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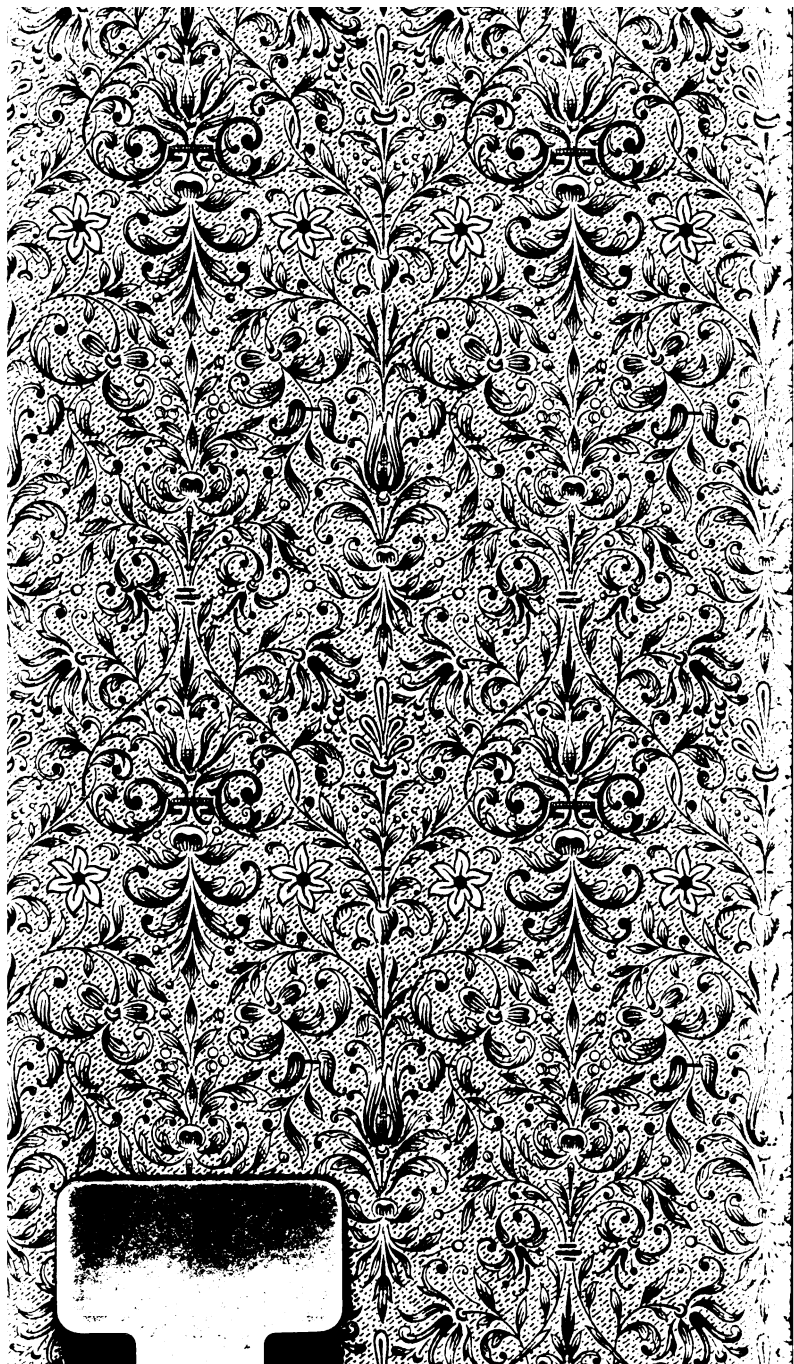
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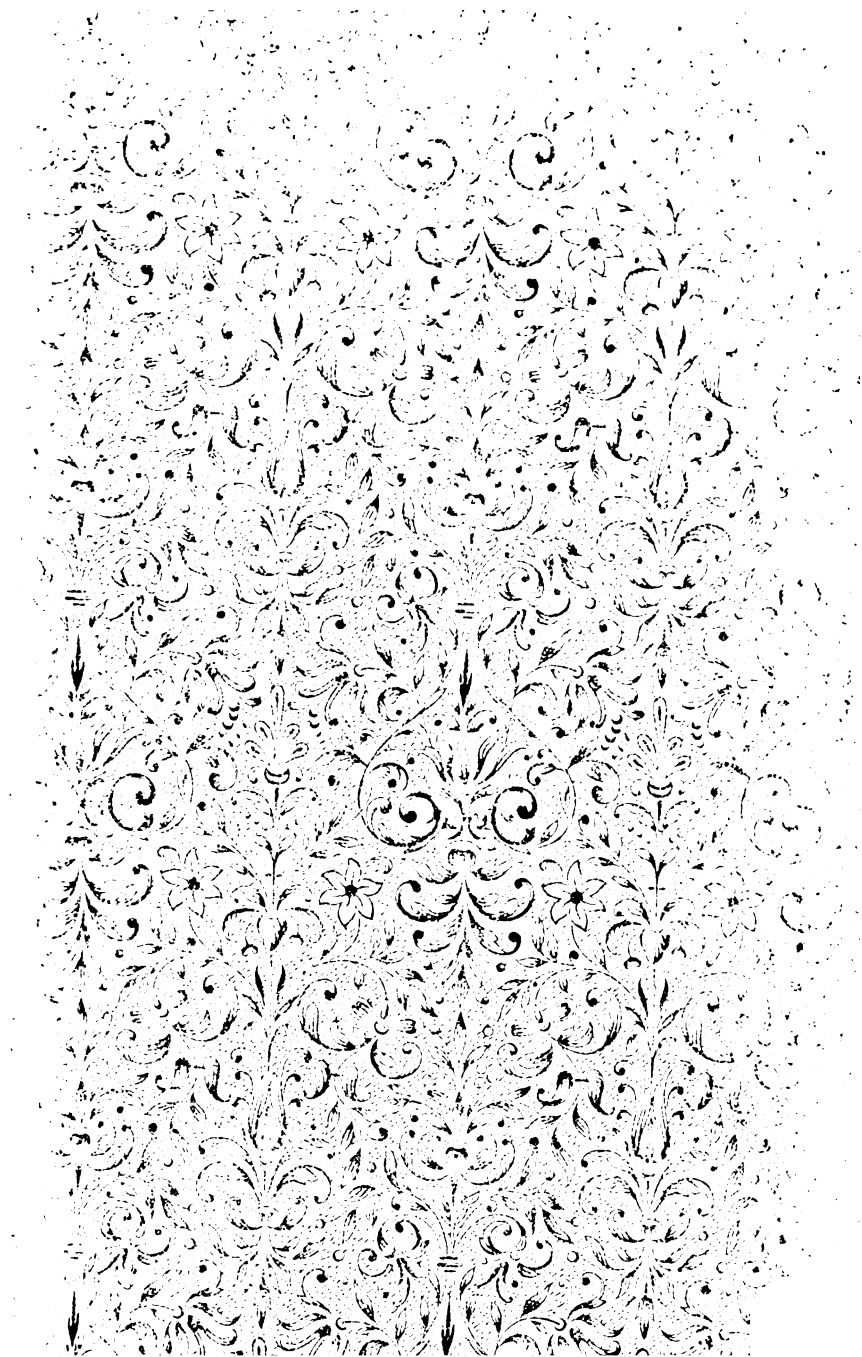
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LEAP YEAR



# LEAP YEAR

BY

M. A. CURTOIS

AUTHOR OF 'MY BEST PUPIL,' AND 'THE STORY OF MEG'

*IN TWO VOLUMES*

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\* February has twenty-eight alone,  
And all the rest have thirty-one.  
But Leap Year, coming once in four,  
Gives to February one day more.'

# LEAP YEAR



## CHAPTER V

LET us, now that we have reached this period, give a few thoughts to some other judgments. In a doubtful position it is not only the opinion of dependants and servants that has to be considered, nor even that of the inner domestic circle that can pierce so deeply in our flesh, the social world around must have its voice as well. And that voice, though influenced by many differing motives, has its importance too.

It is not to be supposed that in the little

world of society that surrounded Landene, the coming-home of Lord Farnim's bride was an event of so little importance as to pass without remark. Previous events had indeed invested the circumstance with an interest peculiar to itself, but in any case it must have excited some attention at the time. The great houses, or rather their inmates, were disposed to shake their heads, but the smaller circles were all aglow with a keen excitement and delight.

This interest had been at first rather checked than heightened by the departure of Lord Farnim from his home. It had been universally supposed, even by the servants at Landene, that some unexpected business had occasioned his sudden departure; and the first idea concerning it consisted mainly of a regret that the lovely bride, of whom so many strange stories had been heard, would be not very visible as yet. Her own illness under the circumstances seemed affecting and natural enough; and her behaviour during those weeks in which she first began to receive visitors—gentle, soft, retiring, a little subdued by the fact of her husband's absence, but still perfectly and quietly self-possessed, left nothing of gracefulness to be desired. There were

some vague murmurs indeed that the absent husband had been getting himself into unheard-of troubles, but, in spite of all that had gone before, no one as yet supposed that those troubles had any connection with his wife.

It was scarcely to be supposed, however, that a state of things so unsuspecting would continue long in this suspecting world; and indeed, before the middle of August had come, other rumours were beginning to arise. Minna's past history had been long a subject of comment; Mr Bortop, who most understood the present position, was not the most reticent of men; there were some servants at Landene who had accompanied Lord and Lady Farnim on their bridal tour—on these insufficient grounds the many murmurs of vague gossip began to rise again.

At first still these only referred to some supposed quarrel, of which the cause of dispute remained unknown—or it was whispered sarcastically that Lord Farnim had soon grown tired of his bargain after all. These ideas were scarcely pointed enough to give the interest desired; it was a happy thing for the whisperers that as the corn ripened some other murmurs began to ripen too.

Who, it was asked, in that low and breathless indignation that belongs to this well-conducted world, could be this young man who was so often seen about the place? Morning callers—in the midst of the afternoon—had often found him there; he was to be observed at the village church; it was well known that he lived in a corner of the park. He said that he was a relation of Lord Farnim, he declared that he was employed on the estate; who could be sure of that?

On the whole the first result of these inquiries was that a general interest began to be felt in Frank, and a disposition to ask him to garden parties began to be manifested—whether because being young and single he was peculiarly eligible for invitations, or because it was hoped that a seasonable round of amusements might divert him from evil courses, or because the sight of a hero of gossip is acceptable in the eyes of a world which would lose its chief stimulant if it could talk no longer of the sins and the follies of its neighbours, it is impossible to say. With much charity the society round Landene determined to make the best of him.

But at the same time, the same people who were

discussing the propriety of sending cards to Frank, began to consider whether that same propriety did not demand that they should renounce the acquaintance of Lady Farnim, or treat her with a distant haughtiness at least. For it is well known that society draws a fine distinction between man and woman, and that certain ideas with regard to the treatment of each sex would appear to be regulated by the law of contraries. The society round Landene desired to conduct itself according to rule; Lady Farnim had become a social problem, and there was much discussion over her.

Let us consider what was the action of the great houses, who on such occasions ought to serve like the first class of a school to set an example to the rest.

The greatest house beyond all question in the county was that belonging to the Marquis and Marchioness of Claiven, who did not often favour it with their presence, but who happened this year to be at home. The Marchioness of Claiven had been celebrated amongst London beauties in her youth, and some curious stories had once been told of her. But she had now become very

old, stiff in manner and doctrine, and, above all things, most rigidly select. At an early date she had announced her intention of not calling upon Lady Farnim; and, as she lived at some twenty miles' distance, there was every reason to suppose that her determination would be kept.

The next greatest house was inhabited by Sir Hickary Bennet and his lady, and was by some fifteen miles nearer to Landene than the last. Sir Hickary had been very fast in his youth, and, as far as his infirmities would permit, was as fast as he could be in his age; he was a sportsman and a drunkard, blustering in manner, and not too refined in looks. But he was a great admirer of beauty for all that; and as he was accustomed to declare, with various strong expressions, that he at least was not particular, it was supposed that the new arrival might expect support from him. He called accordingly upon Lady Farnim with his wife, and then sent a present of peaches, and then called again alone. Minna received him with the utmost coldness, but Sir Hickary was not a gentleman who could be very easily rebuffed.

The next and only remaining great house of

the neighbourhood belonged to Lady Creeve, but she was poor and a widow, and lived in a small house outside, whilst the great house was repaired in order to be let. Lady Creeve was beautiful and gentle and refined, timidly upright, and only too easily disturbed. In the days when Lord Farnim's absence first became known, a feeling of pity induced her to call upon his bride; then when rumours began to spread she feared that she had done wrong in doing so and became unhappy and perplexed. A very little evidence on the other side would have served to relieve her, for she was one who was easily convinced.

These, then, were the great people who formed the highest society of the place; but beneath them we may imagine some shoals of others, of less grandeur from a social point of view, the inhabitants of country houses and of villas, the wives of doctors, of lawyers, of retired officers, and of clergymen, who also had their opinions to bestow. On the whole these were favourable to intercourse with the deserted bride at first; there are great advantages in being acquainted with a title, and if there seemed something doubtful in the lady's position, there was all the more reason to suppose



that she could not afford to look down too much on them.

It would appear, therefore, that during those first times at least, Minna need not have been in need of friends. But she kept strictly to her first resolution of not going out at all. When her husband came back she would return all visits; she was alone now. After a while she paid a few calls: 'She was compelled to show that she was not ungrateful for all the kindness she received,' she said, 'although Lord Farnim's business detained him still.' But she continued to refuse all invitations. She did not wish to be gay during the time that her husband was away. In this manner she could keep up still the idea of his return, and produce also a belief in her own quiet soberness of behaviour that might prove of great advantage in the position she maintained. This was her conduct, and during the first few weeks it was as successful as she hoped.

But as time passed, and the golden corn was bound into sheaves, other dangers began to arise for her, from which we can easily understand that it was more difficult to free herself. One small

scene that occurred in that hot August weather may be enough for this.

It was a close and sultry day. Mr Bortop had barely recovered from his rheumatism-fit; and was still in a lamed and irritated state, lying with his leg upon a chair, and grumbling over the account books which were strewn around him as he lay. Frank had soon had enough of his society, and retreated to his own room, carrying off a pile of books with him, and resigning himself to spending his morning over the adding of complicated figures and the arranging of torn and dirty bills. It was not quite the day, perhaps, to bend over accounts indoors, whilst what air there was to be had could only be gained without, and there were gray and purple shadows in all the vistas of the park; but he made the best of his position that he could, and, by the help of whistling and pulling at his curls, and stretching himself into wonderful attitudes, got through his morning's task with some creditable skill. Any eyes looking in through the little lattice in the gable roof that morning must have been impressed with the young brightness of his look. But in real truth he was in low enough spirits, though

he kept up appearance even when he found himself alone.

That morning he had received a letter from his father, alluding, in even sterner terms than usual, to the pressure of approaching poverty, and intimating that it was time for him to begin to learn to work. With these words came also some information concerning a relative, who had bought a large farm in Australia, and who seemed in need of help. Frank tossed the letter impatiently aside. as soon as it was done; he had not many fears of the threatened poverty, and he had no intention of going to Australia, but the hint of idleness displeased him, and it seemed even more than usual as if for some reason or other his father was not satisfied with him. Without staying to consider that matter he set to work again.

After dinner was over he presented the completed accounts to Mr Bortop, who received them with a grunt, and without a word of thanks. Still looking over them as he lay upon his two chairs, and without taking the trouble even to raise his head, he issued his directions for the afternoon. 'There was a farmer to whom some messages must be taken at once,' he said.

'I am going over to Landene,' said Frank, leaning against the mantel-piece with a hand in each pocket as he spoke. Mr Bortop, raising his head a little now, glanced up at him with a somewhat evil look.

'Is it Lady Farnim you are going to see?' he said.

'Yes, it is.'

'It seems to me you go there very often now.'

Frank made no answer of any sort to that, but keeping his hands in his pockets, looked out of the window and began to hum a tune. It might have been observed, however, that his face was flushed. Mr Bortop glanced up at him with the displeasing look again. He had been seeking forbidden consolation that morning, and his eyes were red; perhaps the same circumstance disturbed his reticence for once.

'Look here,' he said, 'I tell you you'll get yourself into a fine scrape one of these days; that's what you will. It's all very well to count on Lord Farnim being away, he knows about every stick that breaks down here, and may come down at any moment that he likes. And as for my lady, she likes some amusement well enough, but she'll

leave you to pay the piper with my lord at any instant ; that's what she will.'

There was a little pause.

'You're young, you see, there's where it is,' said Mr Bortop, stirring his great form upon the chairs in a patronising and a soothing way. 'And as you are here with me I take this care of you.'

'Thank you,' said Frank, after a little silence ; 'I am very much obliged to you indeed. But I feel sometimes as if I would rather be left to take care of myself. I have to go to Lady Farnim to ask what she has decided about the gates, and as I may be able to set on to your affairs when I have done, I had better start at once.' And with that he went.

The words that he had heard rang with some unpleasantness in his ears notwithstanding, as he made his solitary way through the park. But the summer sunlight was strong and bright above, the birds were singing, and he found little paths for himself between the trees. The effect of the words still lingered, but it was becoming more easy to forget.

A little scene, however, that occurred afterwards, brought back their force again. He crossed the

park without meeting anyone, and leaving behind him the shadows and the coolness of the trees, went through the great kitchen-garden between the ivied walls. Beyond were the rose gardens where the blossoms, after having drooped for some weeks, were beginning to bloom with August flowers again. It was so pleasant here, with the loneliness and the slanting sunlight upon the bushes, that he could not choose but linger for a while ; and it was some time before he reached the further end, where a little arch led through the low ivy covered wall to the plantation walk beyond. He had nearly reached this when the sound of voices and laughter made him pause.

The next instant a gaily dressed party came through the arch to him—ladies with gay summer dresses and painted parasols, chattering and laughing as they came. Conspicuous amongst them all by her loveliness, Lady Farnim led the way, her white muslin and drooping lace agreeing well with her gracefulness, her eyes laughing under the dark hat with crimson ribbons and poppies that she wore. Talking and laughing together, they all came down the path, and then all stopped together as they caught sight of Frank.

For him, too, there was a slight instant of confusion, as he remembered that he ought not perhaps to have been found alone in this manner in the private gardens of the house. But his self-possession rarely did desert him much; he came forward at once to Minna, raising his hat as he did so. Then, as she lifted her head slightly and their eyes met, a boyish impulse overcame him, and he spoke the first words that came into his mind at once.

‘Oh, Lady Farnim, I have found the moss-rose tree,’ he said.

Minna drooped her eyelids a little, though her head was still raised, and she continued to look with half-closed eyes at him. There had come round her lips an expression of the most icy, humiliating scorn, and its cold quietness was in the voice with which she spoke to him.

‘Oh—indeed—I am glad to hear it,’ she said. ‘You came this way because it was nearest, I suppose. Have you any message on business for me?’

‘I have brought word from Nicholson about the gates.’

‘Oh—yes—I am sorry I have not time to attend

to that just now. If you go into the house I have no doubt that Gibson will tell you all you need. We shall be having tea in the garden by the time that you have done.'

'Thanks, no,' said Frank, 'I must get back at once.'

He raised his hat, keeping back as well as he could the mortification that felt as if it must contract his lips, not much soothed by seeing that the ladies of the company were looking with great attention and interest at him. Standing on one side as well as the narrow garden path would allow, he left them all to pass; and then, whilst their merry whispered voices sounded behind him, went on his way alone through the arch, and on through the dark plantation paths, to the brighter terraces beyond. The house looked great, gray, lonely as usual in the midst of the brightness, the window-doors of the library were open, he entered there, and sitting down by the table, laid his head upon his arms. He had never felt so alone, humiliated, left entirely to himself. It seemed to him as if it might be better after all to set off for the distant country, and to leave behind him



this land where nowhere, not even here or at home, he was desired.

The sound of the opening door roused him, and made him raise his head. But the intruder had seen his attitude, and came down the room to him at once.

He felt too tired and vexed to rise, but he looked towards her as she came. Amy was in white, with a hat with white ribbons, and a bunch of red roses in her hand; her attire made her seem even more childish than before. So he thought as she came down the room, but as she paused by his side he was surprised at the dark unwonted steadiness of the eyes with which she looked at him.

‘Are you ill? Is anything the matter?’ she said.

‘Oh, no, I am not ill, I am only vexed,’ said Frank, leaning his elbows on the table and his head upon his hands. ‘There is nothing much in that.’

‘I think, too, there is nothing that can cure vexation,’ he added with a sigh. He felt too tired to lift his head; the change coming on his usual brightness, had produced an effect as strong as that of illness on his face. Amy stood by his side, looking at him with pity and anxiety in her eyes.

'Oh, yes, there is—I am sure there is,' she whispered softly. 'There are so many things—little things. Look how pretty these roses are.'

With a childish movement she held them out to him and he touched them gently with his fingers, restraining an inclination that he felt to take instead the pretty hands that held them in his own. The little action had effect, for a smile began to grow upon his face.

'Are they not pretty? Do they not do you good?' she said.

'So much.'

An irresistible feeling of absurdity was beginning to conquer his annoyance, and as he raised his face his blue dark eyes flashed with their old light once more. But that sight restored Amy's self-consciousness immediately. A slight colour rose in her cheeks, she turned away her head slightly, and spoke with a primness, that showed at once how far removed from her usual manner that simple movement of pity and of help had been.

'You must excuse me, if you please,' she said, in her little dainty voice; 'Lady Farnim, I know, is waiting now for me.' And gathering up her white dress with her hand, she went softly and

gently through the door. Frank sat still, looking after her, with a little expression of irritation and disdain upon his face, which a little reaction changed an instant afterwards into an expression of interest again.

‘She had a very earnest expression for that one minute,’ he said, absorbed still in his relenting mood. ‘If she could have that more often she might grow up into one of those women who give real help to men.’ And then, as he felt himself revived, he got up and went off towards his work. He had no intention of doing anything more with regard to the business on which he had come, but Mr Bortop’s message to the distant farm could be delivered still. One more scene that he had not expected remained for him before the day was done.

Late in the evening he returned, having walked for many miles, for he had not gone back to fetch his horse. The sun was sinking and there was golden light upon the grass, but there was very little air, and the evening seemed oppressed already with the weight of the sultry night that was to come. He was tired enough to make a saved half-mile a real relief to him, and, after a

little hesitation, he entered the plantation behind the house, thinking that he would go across the rose-garden and spare himself a considerable portion of the park. No one was likely to be about at that time, and, without permission given, he had always known himself able to go where he chose about the place.

It was not, however, without some reluctance now that he passed through the little arch whose threshold he had crossed once before that day—he even stood still for an instant, whilst the ivy branches drooped above his head. Then he went on. The plantation was dark behind him, but the rose garden lay in evening light beyond, and there in the midst, with the sinking sunlight upon her, Lady Farnim stood in her white dress amongst the flowers.

Her face was towards him, and he knew that she had seen him as he came. If it had not been for that he would have turned back silently and gone. As it was he felt no inclination to retreat, and he came forward, intending to raise his hat and to pass without a word. But in the narrow path this movement could be easily prevented, and as he

came close to her she lifted her face towards him and smiled.

The sunlight was on her features whose dark colouring looked like that of some dusky flower. Frank stood still, held by her loveliness, unable even to show the anger that he felt. And then, with a look like a gleam of light rippling under her dark eyelashes, she looked at him again.

‘Well, have you spoken to Mr Gibson?’ she said.

‘No.’

His ill-temper expressed itself in the shortness of the answer. But the next instant a feeling of shame made more fitting words become possible from him.

‘It is your decision for which we have been waiting, Lady Farnim,’ he said slowly and gravely. ‘And you have instructed us to take all final orders only from you.’

‘Tell me, then.’

Minna stood looking up still at him, her lips drooping a little apart with the sweet expression into which their loveliness could fall so easily. Frank could not but be sensible of this. He told her shortly and gravely all he had to say, listened to her answer, which, after a few remarks, amounted

simply to the fact that he might do exactly as he pleased, and then paused a little that he might prepare to go.

‘It is getting late. I shall be expected back,’ he said, with the same constraint in his tone; ‘have you any other message still for me?’

‘There is—one other thing,’ she whispered, a whisper as soft and trembling as the evening air that stirred the leaves.

He stood waiting.

‘Have you forgiven me?’

She raised her face—the faint glow of light was on her dark hair and parted lips, and on the lovely pleading darkness of her eyes. Frank felt hard and angry still, determined not to be subdued by her, remembering well the scorn with which she had treated him before others, vexed even that she should think he would be pleased with the difference that she made as soon as they found themselves alone. These things rose fast within his heart, and yet—and yet, though they rested still within his mind, he could think only of the lovely darkness of her glance, of the brown delicious softness of her cheek, and of the loveliness of pleading in her lips. The evening glow was on

these things, he stood and looked down on them—then he smiled, bent his head a little, raised his hat, and walked away. As if he were in some dream from which he could not rouse himself, he went vacantly through the evening shadows in the park.

An hour later, he was sitting alone within his room, to which he had retired as soon as he could escape there—sitting with his hands clenched and crushed beneath his chin, his feet twisted hard against each other; but with a light, as if he were dreaming still, within his eyes. Oh, what did all this mean?—he could not understand himself at all. The sense of anger was struggling with fascination in his mind, his pulses were beating with an excitement so new to him that it almost brought terror as it came. Oh, would it not be better to give it all up and leave the country, and escape this folly, that could only bring contempt and scorn on him?

He got up and began walking restlessly about the room. Struggling within him were thoughts of selfishness and heartlessness, of a character too untrue for friendship, an ingratitude that would take all without any thought of a return, a disposition that would accept easily the sacrifices that

required no payment from its hands. He thought and argued upon these matters for a while. Only not for long ; there was something else that made a more pleasant picture in his mind—the dark upturned loveliness that had been close to him. For a while the struggle lasted ; and then, giving himself up to that more pleasant sense, he let the floating dream move still before his eyes, whilst he walked on restlessly up and down the room.

And then, at last, he came close to the window, and leant his head against the panes. The reaction was coming, as to a mind not yet unhealthy, it was sure to come at last ; but he was yet far too tired and exhausted to reflect—he could only look out vacantly on the gloomy trees and gathering darkness on the park. Oh, would it not be better to go out to Australia and leave all this behind ?

It was then that, without exactly knowing why, some words he had heard from his father long ago began to put themselves together in his head—words with which rose once more the little village church, and its few dim evening lights, and his father's tall figure rising high above the rest. He did not know whence it came, the little bitter sentence, but he remembered that it had impressed



him at the time, it seemed to have gathered new force and meaning now.

‘When we know indeed what is highest, then we follow it,’ Mr Mannian said. ‘But a young man does not often see the light of heaven, he prefers to follow the folly that may prove the light of hell.’

The words seemed like a sting that could pierce down to that which was strongest in his heart, and rouse there a strength against himself. He would not—would not be base. The silent words came with a catching of the breath that sounded almost like a sob. And having made this resolution he resolved no more, but went at once to bed and slept. . . .

The next morning he had recovered enough from the fever to wonder what had excited him so much. But as time passed on a little of its uncomfortable influence remained. An uneasy consciousness surrounded Landene, he could go there no longer with such simple pleasure now. Something had broken in him with regard to Lady Farnim. The eagerness with which he had once promised his friendship seemed like a past event, and yet her loveliness was fascinating, and

the easy luxury of the hours he could spend near her remained still delightful as before. Under these contrary influences he seemed sometimes to himself as if he were driven helplessly by quite opposing winds, and now he determined on Australia, and now he would renounce his doubts, and spend his afternoons at the great house with a sort of defiance of himself. And still he felt always as if some decision must be made, and yet left it undetermined as before.

What would have been the natural result of his hesitations it is almost impossible to say. A little unexpected event and danger was to give a new direction to his life.

## CHAPTER VI

ON the last day of August, Frank Mannian and Amy Merse went out together to walk along the Beck.

It was a bright and lovely day. There had been a long late summer, and an early harvest, the stifling heat of the last few weeks was almost gone, but the quick wind had the breath of summer in its softness still. Far above, flecks and streaks of white clouds drifted in the blue of the sky, the lanes beneath were strewn with remnants from the 'leading,' and here and there on hedges or low

boughs rested the bits of straw or corn that had been caught from the waggons as they passed. The distant country was gray and soft, in a few of the fields the sheaves were lingering still, and the sunlight made the stubble as golden as if the corn were there. As they came down the hill together they could see before them the straight line of the Beck below, the dark silver green of the willows along its course, the field rising golden beyond in which the gleaners bent, and above that again some distant trees and a church spire rising amongst them into the gray distance. The sense of loveliness could not but be with them, but they had not many words for each other as they went.

Indeed it had not been the wish of either that they should be together in that manner, and they had the constraint of those who submit unwillingly to an enforced companionship. Since that little scene in the library, Amy had redoubled her manner of stiffness and propriety with Frank; and annoyed with the persistent shyness with which she checked all advances, he had kept as far from her as he could. But he had spoken of his old sketches, and Lady Farnim had playfully declared that she would buy from him a drawing

of the Beck, and had sent out Amy to show him her favourite corner—so they were together now without possibility of help.

The day was lovely, the air soft and sweet round them, and the feeling of the joy of the harvest rested still upon the land. Amy could not but feel these things; there was a certain stifled sense of pleasure low down within her heart, but she subdued it beneath the little austerity of manner in which she kept herself. As for Frank, he was not altogether pleased with his companion, but they were together, and he must make the best of that.

‘One thing I don’t like about this place,’ he said cheerfully, as they went together down the hill, ‘it is that one can be here for months and see nothing whatever of the poor. The village is too far off; if I lived here altogether, I should not like the loneliness of that.’

Amy looked up at him in some surprise, ‘But one does not ever see very much of any of the poor,’ she said.

‘Oh, don’t you think so? I have always thought that to be in one’s own village, amongst one’s own people, is the ideal of life.’

Amy paused for a moment to reflect. 'Your own people—do you mean the tenants upon your land?' she said.

Frank began to laugh. 'Oh, dear no; nothing at all of that sort,' he replied. 'Your tenants—why, they would be always coming to you to have their roofs repaired, or to say that one or other of their pigs had died. You would be too high above them altogether—I mean the people whose faces you know, and whose cottages you can go in and out amongst as you can in the rooms of your house—I don't mean,' he added, after a pause, 'that they belong to you, I mean more that you belong to them—I think that's it.'

But Amy waited in perplexity, considering still. 'My mother says if you go too much amongst the poor you encourage them,' she said.

'Encourage them—to what?' asked Frank, laughing. 'To expect half-crowns of you? But if you don't give 'em they will soon see there is not much use in that.'

Again there was silence. 'I think,' said Amy, with added stiffness, 'that there are differences in station which must always be observed.'

'Oh, no doubt; but I was brought up amongst

the village boys,' said Frank. And he added inwardly, 'What a little odious prig it is.'

They relapsed into silence, for the hill had grown steep, and it had become more difficult to walk. Amy went on first, holding her blue and white muslin dress with her hands, in careful daintiness; she was glad not to be obliged to speak, the light broad-trimmed hat that hid her eyes, concealed also the wistful darkness of their look—and whilst her companion's last words went on still within her head, they mingled with the old trouble, that for the last few days, had made sorrow and confusion there. She did not wish to betray the confidence of Lady Farnim that she had heard, and yet she felt herself wicked to keep her father and mother in ignorance; she could not bear to think of troubling them, she dreaded lest any words of hers might ensure a command to return to them at once, and yet she felt as if she were no longer treating them with the uprightness of conduct they deserved. She was miserable, but she kept these feelings concealed beneath the little armour of propriety in which she enclosed herself—austerity of manner and feeling, that seemed as naturally correct to her as the soft ribbons and the

pretty dresses that she wore. This was her reserve, and reserve means a certain sort of strength.

‘Why were you brought up amongst the village boys?’ she asked, with some curious interest at last.

‘I don’t know. Because, I suppose, I was so much alone at home. I had scarcely any other companions until I went to school.’

‘Oh, how pleasant it is here,’ said Amy, with a little sigh that betrayed some pleasure at last.

They had reached the bottom of the hill, where the lane turned a corner, and were walking now along the Beck. The sound of the water over the stones was in their ears, the Beck was very full, shaded from the sunlight by the high hedge and trees. And now there came a gurgling noise, two sheep from the field had found their way down to the water’s side through a hole in the hedge, that admitted also some wavering sunlight on their backs. A little further was a gate through which they passed, and entered the great field in which the gleaners were.

‘This is better than the park,’ said Frank. ‘It is a comfort that one has not to go far or to pay much to have such things as these.’



'I think one values them more,' said Amy, with shyness, 'when one has lived in London, as I have all my life.'

'The country, yes, but not the people perhaps,' said Frank, 'we need a little while in which to grow to them.' He stooped to pick a forget-me-not, and they became silent again.

They went along by the water's side. The gleaners raised themselves now and then to look at them, and then stooped down over their work again. The rough stubble, golden in the sunlight, came almost to the water's edge, but long grass made a path for them just beyond, and drooped down the bank towards the Beck, over which from the other side the willow trees were bent. Amongst the rough bushes on the bank the meadow-sweet was growing, and lower down were the great blue forget-me-nots, for which Frank kept scrambling as they passed. And then they came upon two little boys who had been sent out by their mothers to glean, and who were intent upon doing anything rather than the business on which they had come. And then they made a few remarks upon the unpoetical ways of the gleaners in these parts, in cutting off the ears and putting

them into great bags, instead of carrying the corn loosely bound together on their heads. 'It destroys the sentiment of the thing, I think,' said Frank. And still as they went, the noise of the water went on within their ears.

'The Beck is very full and strong to-day,' said Amy. 'I once asked Lady Farnim if it would be possible to be drowned in it, and she laughed, and said that I should have to lie on my face and try very hard before I could. But a little further on it is almost as deep as a river—you will see.'

They turned a corner again, but went on still along the Beck. And then they passed a farmhouse, where was a dog who came out and barked at them. A little further was a plantation, whose trees made dark shadows on the water, though the sunlight came beneath them and made sparkling light as well. They sat down there for a while upon the grass, and Frank bound together with its long blades the meadow-sweet and the forget-me-nots that he had picked.

'It is so pleasant here,' he said, lying down lazily upon his elbow as soon as his task was done. 'The trees are so dark and the water is so bright—I think I will walk no more to-day.'

‘Oh, but you must come on,’ said Amy, with decision, ‘out into the open country, and see Lady Farnim’s tree.’

They did go on accordingly, and reached what she called the open country—a great field of short grass, large in extent as a common, and bright in the slanting sunlight, with the distance gray beyond. Through the midst of this went the Beck, wider and deeper now, with a gurgling and splashing noise over the stones. At some distance it turned a corner, and here two planks across it made a narrow bridge, beyond which the water, deep and wide here as a small river, received the reflection of a broken ash tree whose branches stooped towards it, the lower ones dipping in the water over which the trunk was bent. The banks were steep, but the water had risen from the rain, and part of the overhanging bushes were beneath it too.

They sat down upon the planks with their feet upon the branches of the tree beneath, Amy upright and attentive, Frank leaning lazily, but both absorbed in the idle pleasure that left them no desire to speak. Far behind them was the splashing of the water over the stones, and before

them its different sound against the branches, and all around the great extent of grass on which was the sunlight, and above, the sky, which had become blue and cloudless now. It was quite enough for a while to be still, and feel the water, and the sunlight, and see the reflection of branches and bushes clear in the depths below. A curl of Amy's hair had caught in the elastic of her hat, and she took her hat off, and sat arranging it—a pretty, dainty creature, with the sunshine upon her bent head. It seemed to Frank at that instant as if she belonged to the sunlight and to the air—he leant his face upon his hand, watching and silent, with a joy of living in his heart—the air was sweet with summer, it seemed good to live to-day.

‘The reflection is very clear,’ she said. ‘The water makes a sort of pool here at the corner—it is very deep, they say.’

‘Lady Farnim's tree is really picturesque. The branches come in convenient for our feet,’ said Frank. He leant upon his elbow, looking backwards over the grass on which the sunlight shone. After a little while his companion spoke again,

‘Do you know, I feel such a longing to get down upon that tree,’ she said.

‘You will be afraid.’

‘Oh, no, I shall not. I never did anything of the kind before. Do let me try.’

She took hold of the rough bridge to steady herself, and slipped down upon the tree, paying no attention to the offered hand which he held out to her. Then she sat down among the branches, arranging her hat upon her head, and looking up with shy delight at him. It was the country pleasure, all so new to her. But the fact that he was looking at her recalled her to herself, and she turned away her head and looked down at the reflection of the branches in the stream. She was thinking that the summer seemed so lovely round her, she had never known so much delight before. But the fear that her companion might consider her forgetful made her speak to him again.

‘Will you not come here too? It is so much more pleasant here upon the tree.’

‘I do not think that there is room enough for me.’

‘Oh, yes, there is. I need only move a little way,’ she said. She began to move, and then turned partly, as she found that her dress had caught upon a bough. Leaning over in this

manner, she saw the reflections beneath her for an instant, and then all at once she found that she was slipping; there was an instant's confused struggle, and then she knew that she was sinking, and that the water had closed above her head. . . .

In that same instant, as it seemed to her, his arm was round her and they rose together. And then, she scarcely knew how it was, there seemed a shock that stunned, and they began to sink again. And then it was all darkness, and confusion, and they were below, far below, away from light and air, held down under the water by the bushes, whose branches rose entangling and dark above their heads. For some long instants they seemed to be still. And then, as the desire to breathe became like an agony in its suffocation, he made some terrible struggles, caught hold of the trunk of the tree, dragged himself and his companion through the bushes, on to the planks, almost threw her on to the grass beyond; and then, dragging himself more slowly to her side, lay down upon the ground, beyond power of anything save of the long panting breathing that could alone have shown through what a mortal struggle he had passed.

When he could raise himself, he found that Amy

was standing by his side, dripping with water from head to foot, her head bare, her hair wet and hanging, her face white, and her hands clasped tightly on her breast. She was looking down on him, but her words seemed to come against her will; he had never heard that low strange tone from her before.

‘Oh, we ought to be good—I have not been good,’ she said.

Frank heard the words, but he had not much sense with which to put them together in his mind. Still they helped to rouse him, and he rose, slowly and shivering, to his feet, and stood by her side, looking down on the water and the bridge. The sight recalled remembrance, and as the power of breathing slowly returned, his first words could only speak of the peril that had been.

‘Hallo!’ he said, ‘that *was* a toucher. I never thought we should come to the surface again when I felt myself held down like that.’

Amy stood trembling by his side; they were both silent together for a while.

‘I understand now how it was,’ he said, putting his hand to his forehead, and trying to speak as cheerfully as he could. ‘I struck my head against that fool of a trunk, I feel the ache of it still. And

that confused me. . . . And I could do nothing. . . . And yet all through I felt that we were drowning, and that I ought to move. It was like a nightmare, I am rather dreaming yet. Are you hurt?’

It was some little while before she could answer, for she was trembling still. But her words were more in her own voice when she spoke.

‘I struck my shoulder,’ she said, quietly, ‘I do not think much of that—It seemed terrible to be down there, so far away from life—And yet it is not that, it is something more than that.’

Again, after a while, and in much more trembling tones:

‘Oh, I have never done any good, I am not good. I felt it then. . . . I should like. . . . to be better’ . . . . The last words came almost with a sob; with an involuntary movement, caused partly by her trembling, she had dropped upon her knees. Frank stood by her side, moved himself, and silent for a while.

‘Come, dear,’ he said, gently; ‘I must do something for you, or you will be ill, and then I shall have to blame myself. We have had an escape, but we will think of that afterwards, and be thankful for it then. There, that’s right,’ as she rose



quietly to her feet. 'Our hats have gone floating down the Beck, we cannot wait to look for them. Are you sure that you have strength enough to run?'

Amy made no answer, declining silently in this manner his offered hand, and they ran together over the fields towards the house. Long before they got there, they were laughing like children, young enough both to be excited by their rapid movements in spite of all that had passed; but when they were at last together in the hall Frank felt a sort of fear, his companion looked so slight and delicate, as she stood there trembling with cold, with her fair wet hair falling on her shoulders. He could only leave her to the care of the silk-dressed Norris, who was there—Lady Farnim had gone out driving—and promise that he would come and ask after her again. Then, refusing all offers of assistance for himself, he ran across the park to Mr Bortop's house, and there, with the aid of a fire and 'something hot,' soon found himself revived enough once more.

Probably the whole adventure would soon have faded from his mind, a boyish, dangerous scrape

that it was braver to forget, if it had not been for that which happened next.

For that evening, remembering his promise, he walked over the park towards the house. It was a lovely evening, the birds were singing, and a shower of rain had made the blades of grass bright in the light of the sinking sun; and there, in the rose-garden, where he had met Lady Farnim once before, Amy was standing now, a coloured shawl wrapped above her white glistening dress, little silver bracelets shining on her wrists, and her fair head bent towards the wet bushes. She looked slight, fair, delicate, a very flower herself, only as she raised her head he saw that her face was pale, and that her dark eyes were full of the wistful sorrow that has too much thought for tears.

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‘I am afraid you have not quite recovered yet,’ he said. They were still together, but only a few careless words upon her health and upon his own had passed. She was surprised at his graver tone, and raised her face again.

‘Oh, it is not that,’ she whispered, and the delicate colour began to come and go within her

cheeks. Frank looked down on her, surprised and silent.

‘I can’t help thinking,’ . . . said Amy, and bending her head, began plucking at her fingers in a distress a great deal too visibly deep and real to be feigned. He was surprised, but he thought it better to soothe an agitation which he supposed that only some physical depression or weariness had caused.

‘I am not sure,’ he said, ‘that you ought to think at all just yet.’

‘But I cannot help it, not just now, after all this has come. You—did you not think at all when we were together then? Only not like me. It made me see things all at once, when we were held down together there.’

‘It was rather terrible,’ said Frank. ‘If it had been simple drowning, it would not have mattered half so much—it was just that feeling of being held down when one would have risen if one could. I don’t quite like to think of it even now. But still I do not see why you need trouble yourself so much.’

Amy was silent for a while, looking downwards, whilst her lips moved timidly, as if she would have

liked to speak. 'It made me feel all at once—how bad I am,' she whispered, and her eyes filled fast with tears.

'I do not think I understand your feeling then at all,' he said.

'Oh, do you not know?' she raised to him her childish tear-filled eyes, full of the wonder and sorrow of new sensations now. 'How can I explain it to you then, if you have no idea of what I thought at all? It made me feel, I thought fast, so fast, in those few instants, it was as if something had broken down, and I could see where I never saw before. I thought I had been bad and selfish always, never caring really for others, thinking only of myself—that there was no one who could really miss me if I died—It all comes over me now as if I had been so ungrateful all my life—I have never tried to do anything for Him, and He—He died for us.'

There was a little silence whilst the evening light faded round them where they stood.

'He went about amongst others. He worked for them, and helped them all His life,' cried Amy, in too much distress for even her nervousness to be able to keep her silent. 'And I have never thought

at all of all the world outside. I have let the other lives alone, and cared only for myself—oh, I must try all I can that I may be better now.'

Her coloured shawl had slipped from her shoulders, and he could see the round white beads upon her soft childish throat, which was quivering a little with her agitation now, whilst her dark tear-filled eyes were raised to him. Somehow the only feeling that would rise in his mind was one of absurdity as much as of tenderness; he felt the sincerity of her words, on him too came, for the instant, as on herself, that one overwhelming impression of a suffering humanity—but then she looked so slight and pretty as she stood, the softly gathered lace appeared so dainty round her neck, her fair hair was crimped so prettily round the smallness of her head, even the look of strained agitation in her eyes and parted lips could not dispel the childish impression that she made—it was like a little china cup holding itself up and entreating to receive the ocean in its bounds. It did occur to him to think that stronger hands are needed to save the world. But though he could not choose but smile, the smile came so gently that she had no thought of being hurt.

'I have no doubt you are right,' he said. 'We have been so close to an end that we may well think of a new beginning. We will try and do better.'

After that very few more words passed between them ; indeed, Amy's shyness had returned on her at last. Frank gave her a message or two for Lady Farnim, refused all invitations to the house, and gave a strong hand-clasp of farewell. Amy went back slowly and with trembling steps, she was beginning to feel the reaction from excitement, to dislike herself for having spoken of her feelings, and to dread having to tell Lady Farnim of the visit that had passed. Nor was this last sensation at all unfounded, though she could not explain it to herself. Lady Farnim became decidedly displeased, and throughout the long evening that they spent in the smaller drawing-room together, treated her with a kind of cold contempt, and found so many faults with her music that it became very difficult to play. Poor Amy, sick and trembling with fatigue, tried hard to preserve her passionate admiration for her benefactress—but it had become too obvious that the benefactress could be cross.

And, meanwhile, Frank, more happily alone, was sitting at his window, looking out upon the starlight on the park. It was one of those cold, clear nights that can succeed a hot autumn day, and the intense stillness of sky and trees had a subduing effect to which he was not accustomed as he looked. Or there may have been other reasons for his unwonted mood; the sense of conflict that he had experienced during the last few days had grown strangely fainter; perhaps because it had been pressed into the background by the newer sensations that filled remembrance now. As he sat looking out upon the starlight, those moments when he had felt the rush of water in his ears were still present to his mind, the grasp with which he had held his companion, and the strange powerlessness to save that had come over him in that very time when he needed strength so much. After all—they had been in danger—it was not wonderful that on this first night he should be obliged to think of that. And then he smiled to himself as once more he thought of her, so slight and pretty, with such little prim manners and dainty childish ways. ‘It would be too terrible to think of—of the harm that might have happened

to her to-day,' he said, 'but, oh, my dear innocent, ignorant child, in what manner will you, with your disposition, set about to save the world?'

He repeated the words almost aloud, half-laughing to himself as he did so, but they formed themselves, to his surprise, into another thought before he knew. 'At any rate, she makes an attempt towards a better life—and this thing has happened to us both—but I should have had no thought at all of that.'

Almost unconsciously, perhaps because his fatigue and aching head disposed him against his will to dream, he found himself falling into a meditation on his life—the lonely home, the past years of school and college, bright, aimless, careless, drifting where they would, without much attempt of his to guide. Yet they had been pleasant, and they had fallen into no great wrong, he could tell himself as much as that at least. Only he remembered he had not been quite satisfied with himself, on that evening when the honeysuckle was so sweet beneath him, and he had felt the vexation of his father's discontent with him. Perhaps he was really in want of something—some stronger impulse—and again the words that he had remem-



bered once before began to move within his mind. 'But a young man does not often see the light of heaven,'—they said.

He leant against the open window, looking out upon the night. The stars were very bright and calm, the moon was rising behind the trees, and only glimpses of its light could be seen, but it made a clear mysterious yellow glow beneath the darkness of the sky. Frank kept his eyes on that, looking at it, as if he were seeing through the darkness, the light of some higher life, unknown before.

It was characteristic that he did not rise, or change his position, or even think, or pray; he sat still, with his lips pressed together, and his eyes quiet. Nor did he even feel disturbed when he was summoned down stairs by the supper-bell at last. But if anyone had observed him at supper—which Mr Bortop, and Mr Bortop's thin and silent niece did not—it might have been noticed that he spoke more seldom than usual, and that when he was silent, his lips assumed that look of young, quiet resolve, which could belong to them sometimes. The cucumber and cheese were enough, meanwhile, to absorb the attention of the rest.

On the whole, the chief feeling left on his mind that night was one of childish exultation—his companion of that day in the train was starting on a new journey, and he was going to tell her that he would begin as well. It seemed a pleasant thing to him, that he should again begin with her.

Only he did not see her again before he left, though he saw Lady Farnim once. The next morning he received a letter from his father, desiring him to return immediately to his home.

## CHAPTER VII

THE autumn night was closing darkly round the parsonage as Uncle Sarby sat alone within his room. That was a little room enough, for the parsonage afforded him no better, but it had the advantage of being more expensively furnished than any other apartment in the house. It was not possible, however, at this instant to see much of it, or of the furniture it contained. One single candle upon the table gave all the light it had, and that bestowed its chief glow upon Uncle Sarby's face. He had been wheeled up to the table in his

high arm-chair, supported by cushions, and wrapped carefully in shawls; the candle had been lighted, and his desk placed near to him. He had then in his very little voice commanded his servants to retire, and had so been left to spend the evening hours alone.

The light of the candle shone full upon his face—a face that had now for many long years gained the crown of the venerableness of age. It cannot be said, however, that even this had been able to add much dignity to face or form—rather there was something ghastly in the little shrinking figure and corpse-like face, as the old man bent and chuckled over the papers that he held. He might have been some miser, warming cold blood with the gold that his old hands will not much longer grasp, but there was no money near, only the folded papers, old and yellow like himself, whose dead touch meant living memories to him.

There comes a time when the thought even of the past enjoyments of youth has grown old and shrivelled, like the skin that once was soft; when the future narrows slowly round and before, like the contracting walls of the dungeon upon the prisoner; and when the ceaseless infirmities of the

present allow little enjoyment on which to nourish the soul that alone, of all possessions, still remains to us. Mr Sarby had lived a youth of pleasure in his day, had entertained companions, and wasted money, and drunk and revelled with the best. He found himself now, old, infirm, shrunk in body, failing in brain, and in these years which were fast approaching those of dotage, the inmate of a household of which not one member even pretended to care for him. The next world, indeed, remained, but he had never thought of that before, and the mist that surrounded it to him had grown even denser now. The pleasures of youth were gone and had left no ease behind; it might well be thought that in no direction was left the comfort for his remaining years.

But in the midst of the darkness of the room, the little candle shone, like the one last hope that can remain when all the rest have gone. Mr Sarby sat and chuckled, with his head bent over the papers in his hand. If young delight can look forward with eager expectation, it is also possible, we must suppose, for 'the old hope' to have its pleasures too.

Ever since some information received some

months before, these letters of old times, which had been till then almost forgotten, had acquired suddenly an unexampled value in Uncle Sarby's eyes. They had become his companions and his treasures; the new idea that they gave help to form could quicken the failing brain that was fast sinking into its final darkness now. And, yet, in spite of this, the strong desire could not but be that of an old man's affection after all. He would sit chuckling over the papers, fingering them, and stroking them, taking them to bed with him, as a child might take its doll. He would sit laughing to himself over them, trying to remember what he ought to do, unable to join the links of action in his mind. Once he thought he had lost one—a little old bill concerning some jewels he had bought, and for one whole morning he had sat alone in his room crying, unable to look for it himself, and yet unable to endure the thought of telling his servant of his loss. That document had been now happily discovered, but the links of purpose could not join themselves into any action yet.

The candle shone and flickered, the old papers trembled in the old hands, and the yellow corpse-like face bent over them above. It was a ghost-

like scene, and, indeed, if memories can haunt, the air must have been full enough with many phantoms then. Other things in life were growing dark before the dim old eyes, but they could see these phantoms still. A dark eyed girl, impetuous, passionate, beautiful, whose light footsteps, coming still through the darkness, met him in the corner of the garden under the medlar tree once more. Evening after evening, through that one long summer, he could hear her voice whispering still to him of all her wrongs and of the divisions in her home; evening after evening, through that one summer, that meant the only love that all his life had known. It seemed to him that there was more confusion in the rest; but he could see again the great London station with its lights, through which he searched for her. And then he had found her, and as he touched her arm—he could feel again through his old frame, the shock of the voices, which told them that they had been forestalled and discovered even then—

And then—he could not remember so well the succeeding years that came; the changeful London life of many scenes and faces, in the midst of which he had forgotten her so soon. Alas! even in that

young attempt at love he had been entirely false to her, for he had known himself unable to support her, and had enticed her to him by reports of the wealth that he did not possess. She had not needed the enticement, her passionate girl's heart had been only too willing to escape to him. And then they were separated, before even they had met, and in the changing London life he was soon able to forget that he had loved. And then, once again, years afterwards, he heard of her as poor and lonely, in a wretched home, and there woke in him suddenly again the old desires, and he began to long to tempt the woman even more falsely than the girl, and to make use of his wealth, to draw her away from her husband and again to him. A brief desire, failing of itself almost before he heard that she was dead.

So many years ago! And yet still, still, she lingered before him, the girl with the dark eyes, and the eager passionate voice—the girl who could be mocking, scornful, disdainful, but who could never fail to charm him, in spite even of him and of herself. Once—once only after that sudden separation, he had seen her after her marriage for a while, and she had treated him with the contempt



of a woman who knows herself forgotten and deceived ; but he could not, even now, be vexed with her for that ' Poor Mary—Mary,' he chuckled, with faint pride in her spirit, as he remembered that conversation now.

The old papers trembled in the old hands—he had memorials of others, but none so dear as these.

And yet through the long and slowly enfeebling years he had not thought much of her. He had heard that her daughter was poor, pretty, like her father in face, that she had married a penniless adventurer, and had then been lost to view. That had never seemed as if it concerned him much. It was only these other words, coming suddenly after endless years, that had seemed to touch him all at once as with the past again.

'Lady Farnim is very dark and beautiful, a dangerous sort of woman I should say. . . . They say already that her husband has deserted her. That seems a pity, she would be a noted London beauty, if she went into society with him. . . . She was very poor when he married her ; I do not know whether it was that or the queer stories about her that makes him have so much contempt for her.

But she is a woman who has plenty of cleverness with which to help herself.'

'Mary—Mary's child,' muttered Uncle Sarby to himself.

The candle shone and flickered, the old papers lay upon the table, and the old man trembled with weakness as he bent. Dim thoughts were rising in him of a purpose that had long been forming in his heart, a vague self-reproach as he remembered those with whom his life was spent, and a faint exultation that whispered they had hoped no doubt to make their gain of him. If he were not so weak—and still he thought and planned, and the night grew darker round him as he bent.

## CHAPTER VIII

AND, meanwhile, Frank Mannian was standing in his father's room. He had felt his heart beat rather quicker as he entered, for he had not been sure to what cause his sudden summons home was due. Indeed ever since he had returned he had felt himself in the position of one who is expecting some words that he will not like to hear, for though his father's sudden, sharp illness would have been quite excuse enough for his recall, Mr Mannian had never once alleged it as his reason for the letter he had written. He

had been taken ill on the morning of the day on which he wrote, and, when his son arrived, had been confined to his room, unable either to see or speak to him. Since then Frank had not seen him more than once or twice each day, and had spent the greater part of his time, as in former days, alone—invited out for shooting now and then, dining sometimes with his great-uncle, playing cricket in the field near the village as before. The house felt very lonely to him, more lonely than of old, and he did not whistle so much now as he went about its rooms—he felt restless and unsettled, trembling on the brink of some unknown decision, longing for the time to come when his father would speak at last to him.

As he entered the room this evening it seemed to him that the time had come at last.

Mr Mannian sat by the table, the lamp was lighted, but there were no books or papers near. That in itself was a surprising sight, his son had never seen the table bare before. In the old days, when he came to this room to be punished, he remembered that his father used as he entered to push away his piles of books with a weary and impatient sound. Now he was not reading, and it

seemed to Frank, the unpleasant interruption of former times, as if he must have been waiting for him.

He came in, but remained standing by the door. Mr Mannian had been leaning wearily over the table, but he raised his face, more worn even than usual from his illness, and spoke at once.

‘Come here and sit down, Frank,’ he said. ‘I am glad you have come, for there are some things I want to say to you.’

Frank sat down opposite to him, leaning his elbows on the table, and resting his face upon his fists. His ready audacity, always much subdued in his father’s presence, seemed to have entirely deserted him for once. And Mr Mannian also seemed different from himself; as he remained silent his eyes were observing his son with a considering attention they had not bestowed on him before. Perhaps he was struck by some indefinable change of features or expression, his curly-haired lad was gaining the look that belongs to manhood now.

There does come a time for us and those we train when we find, slowly or suddenly, that the boys we have educated to submit to us have become men, with men’s wills, with which our own may clash.

With the best intentions on both sides that time means, at least, that a new position must be assumed by each. In all his twenty-three years of life, Frank's will had never really crossed that of his father's—he had been carefully submissive, Mr Mannian carefully indulgent; with such dispositions on both sides, disputed points had found themselves easily arranged—the easy good-temper of the younger man making a boy's obedience natural far longer than is ordinary to him. But two lives may have been long together before it can be discovered whether a conflict between them has been evaded, or whether it is impossible.

They remained opposite each other—Frank with his young dark face upon his fists; Mr Mannian shielding his eyes from the light for a minute or two, with a hand even more delicate and worn than it had been. Yet, though, when at last he removed it there were evident signs of physical pain and weariness on his features, their fine worn lines had not an expression of weakness as he spoke.

‘I think it best, Frank,’ he said gravely, ‘before all things to be perfectly honest with you.’

Frank remained silent, looking down upon the table. There was a certain feeling of being prepared

for conflict in his mind. But he was willing to wait for the present until he should hear some more.

‘In these difficulties of mine which are growing round me always,’ Mr Mannian said, ‘it is natural that I should wish to see you settled in some more definite employment than you have. I have written to you lately about two openings for you of which I have heard, but you have not expressed any wish for either. And lately—I must tell you the truth—I have received letters about you that have given me some anxiety and pain.

‘If any scoundrel has been slandering me to you,’ said Frank, raising his blue dark eyes suddenly with a heat that was not often natural to him, ‘you might remember that I am your son, and that I have given you no reason not to trust me until now.’ He spoke with an anger that he could scarcely understand, but indeed a fear that had been vague till now was beginning to become more defined within his mind.

‘You are too quick tempered,’ Mr Mannian quietly replied. ‘I have no reason not to trust you, as you say, and I will accept no man’s word against you, if it is not supported by your own.

But a boy of your age can get into trouble simply from want of the experience that older years can give.'

Frank looked down upon the table, pouting a little, and was silent.

'Why do you not care for either of the employments of which I have heard for you?'

'Because I prefer my own.'

'I am glad that is not the manner in which you generally speak to me.'

'I beg your pardon,' said Frank, raising his face with his own bright smile again; 'but I have not yet quite got over that letter which spoke of me— Well, dad, when a fellow has an occupation that he likes, and that has advantages for him, it seems hard that he should be sent off, all on the sudden, to Australia, which is a place where a college education don't count for much, or put as a clerk in a bank, which is a sort of an occupation he detests.' He had spoken brightly, but there was no smile in the eyes, with which his father looked at him.

'You talk of advantages,' he said, gravely and slowly. 'I should like to hear more of those.'

'Well—you see'—after a moment's confusion, he recovered himself courageously again—'they don't



seem much separately, but taken as a lump, they may count for something after all. You pay no premium for me; that's one thing. And I learn farming for nothing. And I like the thing altogether. And Lord Farnim may end by giving me something to do—And then there is society I like.'

'Oh, ah, society!'

said Mr Mannian, with *his* smile, which was a faint sarcastic stirring of the lips. 'That is honest at any rate. But you can scarcely expect me to pay much in order that you may have the croquet parties you desire.'

Frank looked down, pouting again, but with rather a harder pressure of his lips.

'You learn farming,' said Mr Mannian, after he had seemed to enjoy his discomfiture for a while. 'And Lord Farnim, who is our relation, may give you some better paid employment at last. And you like the place and people where you are, and you find your position an easy entrance into a pleasanter social position than you have been accustomed to before. Is that right, or have you any more besides to say?'

But Frank was silent, looking down between his arms upon the table still.

'Well, my dear Frank, you state your reasons

well enough, and I do not wonder that they should seem sufficient to your mind. You like your position at Landene, and that is of course enough for you. But I have now to ask whether you will accept my judgment as a sufficient reason for renouncing it, and returning to your home again.'

Frank looked up, though he still kept his face upon his hands. Its expression had gone through a complete change—a change that can only be understood by those who have seen a bright face under the influence of a shock that has absorbed all its brightness for a time.

'I will tell you my reasons, of course,' said Mr Mannian, observing the alteration with care, but composed and quiet still. 'But first I should like to know whether you are ready to do what I desire.'

His words came with a calmness that is like a pressure, but when he had spoken them there was silence for a while. Visions seemed to be rising fast before the younger man as he sat with his face pressed hard against his hands—the great gardens at Landene with their blaze of flowers, the pleasant summer weather that had passed, the faces of Lady Farnim, of Amy, of the farmers

whom he knew—these had become part of his life ; why should he give up all of these at once ? Yet he felt as if he were struggling under a weight ; he got up and walked towards the door, and then he remembered that last meeting with Lady Farnim, when she had entreated him not to desert her, to be her friend and to come back to her. And he thought, too, of those moments in the water, and of the child round whom his arm had been. He came back and sat down again once more.

He had left home free to act, and he did not return so free as he had been—he felt the difference now. His promise haunted him ; the new life, besides, for which he wished and the companion in it he had chosen ; and withal there was the feeling of resistance, he would decide on his own occupation for himself. He leant his arms upon the table, and looked across it as he leant.

The eyes of the two men met, the sense of conflict was becoming closer now.

‘ Before I decide,’ said Frank, ‘ I think I may ask to hear your reasons first.’

They looked at each other, father and son, the first movement of resistance had been made.

‘ Certainly—you are quite right,’ Mr Mannian

quietly said. 'But if you do not mind, I will begin by asking you a question that will explain the rest—Frank, when does Lord Farnim think of returning to his home?'

There was a short silence. Frank had been partly prepared for the question, and he understood at once and entirely what it meant. The spirit of resistance was rising in him, but he retained enough of his old disposition to hate the thought of the conversation that must follow, and to desire to delay it if he could. Still it was necessary that he should speak.

'I do not know. It is not likely that I should know,' he said.

'And meanwhile—Lady Farnim remains always at Landene, I suppose?'

'Yes.'

'And you see her very often?'

'Yes; almost every day.'

'She is a very beautiful woman, I have heard?'

'Yes, she is.'

Frank answered quietly and steadily, without lowering his eyes. It was not in his nature to look down whilst such a conversation was being held.

But his father's next words came in a more insistent tone.

'She is beautiful then,' he said, very quietly, 'and she is young, and her husband keeps away from her. When a woman is in such a position, a man who knows her ought to do everything to shield her that he can.'

He looked at Frank, who was silent, dropping his eyes now, and drawing patterns with his fingers on the table. Then after that pause, and in the same low insistent tone he spoke again.

'A man does not shield a woman when he continues an acquaintance, that may place her in a false position in the minds of others, simply that he may amuse himself. A boy may do this from ignorance, I know,'—and then he stopped.

There was a little pause, and then Frank looked up suddenly and spoke. 'What have others been telling you of me?'

'You have a right to ask,' said his father, with the same curious quietness still. 'I have heard that in the neighbourhood in which you live they speak openly of Lady Farnim, of her life with her father before her marriage, and of her separation from her husband now. I am sorry to hear

at the same time of her acquaintance with you.'

Again a pause, and then Frank muttered low between his teeth, 'Fools always talk ; but I do not see, even if they do, how they can find fault with me.'

'Oh, dear, no,' said Mr Mannian, with great coldness, 'I do not see how they can find fault with you at all. In fact, I have no doubt that they might think certain things highly advantageous to you—for instance, to accept Lord Farnim's assistance and at the same time to get up a flirtation with his wife. That sort of thing would be a great honour to you, no doubt, a kind of feather in your cap ; yet if I could choose for you it would not be the prestige I should desire.'

Silence again, and then Frank whispered a few words, leaning his face as before upon his hands. 'Do you think me so bad ?' The whispered words came tremulously, but it would have been impossible for anyone who heard to have doubted the sincerity with which he spoke.

'I do not think you bad,' replied his father, quietly ; 'but you do not understand the world,

and may place yourself in more danger than you know.'

'I am in no danger at all.' He added after a while, conscious of the abruptness with which he had spoken, and with more hesitation now—'I mean—I suppose—that any danger—if there is any—would be from Lady Farnim, because she is so handsome, and all that. I do not admire her. If she were free, I should not care for her. But I think she has been very much wronged. I should like to help her.'

There was the same intense entreating sincerity in his tone. But Mr Mannian's face gave no symptom of relief, rather it gained beneath its quietness a pale and startled look. His voice was very low, but it had become still more commanding and insistent now.

'I have told you the best you can do, both for her and for yourself.'

And after a while, in the still lower tone of one who has some final words to say,

'I have listened to all you have told me, and it has determined me still more. There is no doubt in my mind as to what is best for you. Frank, I must desire you to return.'

‘I will not return.’

The words came before he knew, or had considered, with a quickness that was even alarming to himself. But the intense desire to avoid a dispute that arose at the same time with them, made him go on at once in lower and more entreating tones. If his father would only listen to him, they need not quarrel still.

‘I will remember what you say to me, I will think over it, indeed. If I find that my staying does any real harm to her I will return at once. If I find that it might do any harm to me—though it will not, indeed it will not—I will return. I will do everything I can, but I cannot give up at once a life I like because some fools chatter some idle words that do no hurt to me.’

There was a long silence; he began to hope he had prevailed. And then, in the same low tones, Mr Mannian spoke again.

‘I am to understand, then, that you do not intend to do what I desire?’

Their eyes met; neither of them spoke. Frank felt that his heart was beating very fast, he had no power to answer left.

In those minutes whilst he remained silent,



looking across the table into his father's eyes, he thought of Lady Farnim and of the last despairing appeals he had made to him—he thought also of Amy as he had seen her often in the evening, dressed in her glistening white, fair and delicate, with maiden-hair and pink oleander blossoms at her throat. Oh, he could not give up any hope of ever being near her or seeing her again! And then he thought for an instant of speaking to his father, and saying, 'There is still another reason;' but he had no strength for that.'

The minutes of silence passed. Then Mr Mannian spoke.

'If I do not provide you with money, how will you manage for yourself?' he said.

'I am useful to Mr Bortop. I know that for his own sake he will give me money enough to live upon,' said Frank.

'You would like, then, to separate yourself from me?'

'I should like to do what you wish, indeed, I should. But I must have a little time given me first before I can decide. I will think of what you say.' He waited, and then added, with his eyes

upon the table now, 'I am not a child. It seems to me that in some things I may be allowed the power of judging for myself.'

There was silence, and then Mr Mannian said quietly,

'Very well; I understand you. You may leave the room now.'

Frank rose accordingly, and went towards the door, his head hanging a little, and with no expression of pleasure on his face, but with his lips pressed together by inward resolution still. Perhaps that look of young firmness was more than the older man could bear, weak and tormented as he was by the physical pain which, a little driven back by the excitement of the interview, was beginning to press its weary weight on him again. He waited till his son had nearly reached the door, and then he spoke.

'Frank.'

Frank came back, understanding what he had to expect, and stood by the table with his clasped hands resting upon it, and his head bent. Mr Mannian was silent for a while, and then he spoke—with even greater quietness now.

'In old times, Frank, I have been told by those who wished to comfort me that I was a happy man

to have such an obedient son. I felt myself then to be not so happy as I was supposed to be, and it seems now that I was right. The day has come that I have always expected—I will leave you to go on your own way, but I suppose that neither of us will be the same to the other again. You may go now.'

Watching attentively, he saw the slow flush cover the young man's face—not so much a flush perhaps as the hot glow that succeeds a pain. But he did not answer; the two men were resolute, and neither of them on such an occasion would say a word more than was required. Frank went slowly towards the door, with his lips pressed together and his head bent; Mr Mannian let his face fall upon his hands, and gave himself up to the feelings of physical suffering that overpowered him now.

His son went to his own room, and having bolted the door began to walk up and down; pausing after the first few steps to fling off boots and even socks, because the noise of his footsteps disturbed him, a proof of a susceptible state that was not natural to him. He was not sorry though, nor vexed, nor even disconcerted, there was rather an excitement in his thoughts. After all, what had he done?—

only asked for a little time in which to reflect; it was too much that more should be required of him than that.

Why had he been so resolute, so determined not to give way? He was even astonished at himself, it was as if there were feelings in his own mind of which he did not know, that had insisted on determining for him. Perhaps it was the heat of argument which had come on him so strongly whilst he spoke. But yet, though that glow of conflict was failing fast within his mind, he could not be sorry even now. It was not only that he felt himself pledged—it was still so pleasant to him, the thought of the great gardens at Landene, of the summer afternoons, of the faces of Lady Farnim and of Amy—he had cared for his home through all his life, but it had never been so pleasant to him as these.

Yet it had its power upon him still, the lonely home that had been all his past, and he could not bear to think of the broken links he might have made. But though this doubting remorse was beginning to grow within his heart, the stronger feeling that he could not understand held him to

his purpose—it seemed as if it were *right* for him to stay. But remorse could linger still.

Boylike, the remorse came more strongly with his prayers, and after he had lain down he kept turning uneasily, as if he were indeed a troubled child again. He had spoken too hastily, if he had been wiser he need not have quarrelled with his father after all. The uppermost sweetness of his disposition could never make him easy in dispute—as he lay and turned he kept remembering how that after his worst scrapes, when he was a child, and had been with more than usual severity reproved or flogged, he would lie awake at night that he might resolve through his tears on some present of a pincushion or of a pipe, that should make all things right for him. Useless now! The differences of our older years are not so soon forgiven. And then the man's wilfulness, which was so much stronger than the boy's had been to him, whispered that he would keep to his purpose after all.

It was a better feeling that made him remember then the distressed sincerity of those dark childish eyes, and that prompted the wish that came with the memory, 'I should like to be shown how to be

right.' An honest wish brings confidence, he found himself able to fall asleep at last.

An hour later, as he knew by the striking of the clock, he started up suddenly, waked by the broken remembrance that had been weighing on his dreams. His father's medicine! he had forgotten it, indeed.

He sat up in the darkness, trying to remember, rubbing the hair from his forehead with his hands. That afternoon he had ridden into the town for it, but he had loitered carelessly into the summer-house in the garden on his return, where he had found some letters waiting for him, and it seemed to him that he must have left it there. His father might have wanted it, what should he do about it now?

The rain was beating in torrents against the window, and he was almost too sleepy to reflect, but he tried to keep on with his inward discussion still. His father only required the medicine in case of an attack, and it was most probable that he had not had an attack at all. His father also was displeased with him, and most certainly would not wish to see him now. But then, if he were ill, in pain, and wanted the stuff that he might sleep—

Grumbling inwardly to himself, he got out of bed in the darkness. There were no matches to be found, and he dressed as best he could. Then he crept softly down stairs, happily knowing the way without any need of light, undid cautiously, the bolts of the back-door, for fear of disturbing his uncle, and let himself out into the pouring rain without. The summer house was so close, there seemed no need to wait until an umbrella or lantern could be found. But he had not estimated highly enough the difficulty of finding his way through the beating torrents and the darkness. It was a long while, and he had stumbled against many trees, before he could find the place; and when once there, he spent a longer while still in kneeling upon the damp earth, feeling with his arms over the damp seats, whilst the rain came in through a hole in the roof upon his head. He was able, however, at last, to find what he had lost, and with the little bottle in his hand to return more cheerfully through the night and rain again. He found the back-door, drew the bolts softly, and crept upstairs to his father's room.

There was a light under the door; Mr Mannian

was not in bed at least. He knocked softly, and then entered.

The clergyman was seated in his large arm-chair, bent together, his features drawn and haggard with pain. He raised his eyes wearily as the door opened, but at the sight of the young man, in his wet condition, he roused himself at once.

'Why do you come here now? Where have you been?' he said.

'I have brought you your medicine,' said Frank.

He came up to the table that was by his father, and set the bottle down by the lamp, muttering that 'he was sorry he had forgotten it, he hoped it did not hurt.' And then gaining courage, and perhaps not unwilling to exalt the sacrifices he had made; 'I had left it in the summer house outside, and I got up for it. It is a night,' he said.

Mr Mannian put his hand quietly upon the bottle, restraining the inclination that he felt to reply that if he had been in the possession of it some hours before it would have been of greater use to him. The little action, the dark wet curls on the young head, touched him in spite of himself, they reminded him of that which he had said he had lost—the bright-eyed boy who had



been so eager always to be reconciled with him. His answer came with coldness, but was more gentle than might have been expected when he spoke.

‘Thank-you. I am very much obliged to you. You had better get back to bed, or you will catch cold.’ he said.

But Frank did not go, he lingered still by the table, pulling his wet hair with his fingers, his lips trembling childishly, as if he had still some words to say. At last they came, blurted with an effort that showed the struggle in his mind.

‘Look here—I think—I mean—I know—I must have been wrong to-night in things I said. I feel as if I must have some time in which to think ; I can’t go back from that. But I daresay I did get rude or wrong in some way—I often do. I did not mean it, if I were.’

He added a few more words in a lower voice, whilst his eyes filled slowly with tears against his will.

‘You say I wish to separate myself from you. That is not true.’

There was a little silence, whilst the flapping of a great moth became very audible in the room.

'My dear Frank,' said Mr Mannian, with gentle quietness then; 'I have no doubt I was hasty, but you could forgive me if you knew what it was to be half as ill as I. I do not blame you; you have come to an age in which it is necessary for you to make some decisions for yourself. And if we find ourselves more, separated in consequence than we have been, that also is natural, and we cannot help it. I am afraid I am not able to bear more talking now.'

Frank went, with his head downcast, a little comforted, but sorehearted still: Mr Mannian sat up in his chair, leaning against one of the arms and considering, with a look of subdued bitterness upon his face.

'A very affecting scene, indeed,' he said, with a slight movement of his lips that was too sorrowful and bitter for a smile. 'I suppose others would tell me that I must be softened now. It is unfortunate that I seem to see too far below—he means all he says, but he intends to go on the way I do not approve in spite of all. Well, I will not think of it, I know I am not worthy to have an obedient son.'

Perhaps if he had thought of it he might have

considered that there are some compensations after all in life, and that an obedient son might not have been so ready to get up from bed at one o'clock in the morning, and go out into rain and darkness to fetch his medicine for him.

\* \* \* \* \*

A week later Frank stood in the great drawing-room at Landene by Lady Farnim's chair. The flowers were fading in the gardens, and fires had been lighted for the first coldness of the autumn. She looked up with beautiful smiling eyes at him.

'And so you have come back,' she said.

'I have come back,' he answered, gravely, with no answering smile upon his face.

But he had returned after all, and Minna felt quietly content. That morning Amy had received a letter from her mother, in answer to a very guarded statement of facts, containing a permission to remain. A dreary time of expectation must still be passed, so Lady Farnim felt; but she had her friends near her, and for a while, at least, she could be content to wait. She must be patient, the greater hope would begin to wake at last.

So the autumn darkened into longer nights, and then the winter came.

Part Fourth



*Summer-Time*



## SUMMER-TIME

It was a very lovely summer that succeeded the long winter at last.

Roses and strawberries bloomed and ripened, they had been scarcely ever known to be so plentiful before. Honeysuckle hung in the hedges, wild roses blushed into pink beauty after the may had gone, the corn was flourishing, and there were again hopes that the harvest would be fine. One splendid day succeeded another, until men almost grew weary of a monotony of brightness, of the intense blue of the skies that had no floating clouds

to veil their heat. And yet there were heavy cold dews in the mornings, that rose into mists with which the rising sun could scarcely struggle; and in the very hottest of the day there were cool retreats under shadowing branches where little brooks, shallower by the drought, could still keep up their feeble plashing voices on the stones. And now and again, as the weeks moved on in splendour, there came the long warm showers of rain, that bathed the grass with life, and renewed the perfume of the sweetbriars in the gardens. And evening after evening the sunsets flooded the country with a glory of colour, a long red after-glow lingering still after the sun had gone.

It is scarcely possible that in such times as these the hopes of men should not be reviving also, turning towards the sun as plants and flowers do, renewed with light and warmth into surer life again. There comes at times a gladness over all the earth in the summer, stirring in the human hearts as in the fibres of the moss, acting upon men and things as with the faint movement or the first murmured whisper of a universal hope.

And then, each translating according to his own contracted power the universal knowledge, the

schemer begins to think again of his forsaken plans, and good honest mothers have hopes that the winter will find them provided with flannel, and with food, and young spuls turn their fresh faith to their ignorant devices, and old men close a harder grasp on the narrowed life that alone is left to them. Each, after his fashion, contracting to his own individual meaning the voice of the summer that is for all alike.

Some such hopes then, rising with the sunshine, born out of the heat and of the brightness, there must have been in that one beautiful summer of which we speak. But it is probable that most of these raised no voices that the outside world could hear. These secret wishes and stirrings of the heart belong to each alone.

In a little Devonshire town, within a nest of hills beyond which the great moors lay in silence, a tall, thin gentleman had come that year to ask for lodgings before the strawberries were ripe. He had come there for his health, he had arrived lately from abroad, and wanted rest and quiet, he said. Indeed, it was no wonder that he should like the place. The whitewashed walls of the houses were dazzling and yet homely against the blueness of the



sky, the cream and the junkets made a pleasant luxury of food, and beyond the narrow streets where the pretty dirty children made themselves happy in the dust, were the hills with the marshes beneath them, where the cotton grasses grew, the steep lanes whose high hedges were a luxuriance of flowers, the river with the gray stones in it, and the light coming with wavering beauty through the leaves above. The gentleman was often to be found by the river's side, seated upon one of the gray stones, looking down into the water; in that lovely spot it was not to be wondered at that the beauties of nature should engross his thoughts.

If, indeed, it was of the beauties of nature that he was thinking—the tall, thin gentleman in the shabby coat, and with the nervous hands and absorbed and straining eyes. He would sit there upon the gray stone, looking down into the water, and alone, for hours, but it was not much of the scene around him that he saw.

He was living over and over again, as if it were some bad dream from which he could not free himself, the night on which he fled alone from London; the lights of the streets were round him once again, the roll of the carriages was in his ears, he knew

himself once more a disgraced, defeated man, broken down by means beyond his control in the very midst of the success that he had won. 'How was he to have helped—helped it?' The words kept moving like a childish complaint within his mind—he could not have foreseen it, this thing that was so terrible, at which he shuddered even now. Something seemed to have broken in him then; he was never able now to rouse himself to struggle as of old. 'And Minna—Minna had married a lord—she was a good child, always so good and clever—only she would not see him now.'

He ought not to be in England, he was breaking the engagement he had made. But surely Lord Farnim would not take away the money, the little money, he had from him. And he knew Minna would not see him—she was always hard and cold.

The light came through the leaves round him in wavering flecks and gleams, the river made soft plashing noises round the gray stones on which the mosses grew. Something in the quietness and beauty seemed to him like a rest, he would loiter here day after day, hour after hour, soothed by the light and by the calmness, with the murmur of the

water in his ears, without thinking what the future, that had so little hope for him, would bring.

Far away in the midst of England the honeysuckle and red roses were growing on the gray vicarage walls again, and down below the garden was full of the bright colours of geraniums, and the masses of white pinks made light in its dark corners as of old. Mr Mannian often walked in the evening among the garden paths as he had done in years before, more bent in figure, more worn in features now.

Perhaps he was not much moved by the brightness, though the sky was very blue above his garden walls. He felt careworn and lonely, his infirmities were growing upon him, and the slowly increasing difficulties were pressing round him still. To his son he did not often write, nor did he receive much pleasure when he heard from him; the feeling that his will and advice had not been followed remained with him always, and the separation, of which he had spoken, was becoming more and more an acknowledged fact to both. After all, he told himself, sensible of the dull weight that seemed to press always on his mind,

‘It was no doubt for the best that he should be quite alone.’ But he was just conscious of the sweetness of the red roses in his garden in spite of all.

One strange event had really happened that year within his house ; an event that meant a hope, as the fresh green leaves upon the ash mean life although the tree is old. After many preparations, after the arrival of an invalid carriage from London, after much ordering-in of wine, and much wrapping in shawls, after endless directions to servants, and repeated snarls that ‘they intended to kill him amongst them all—he always knew they did,’ Uncle Sarby was actually able to leave the house at last. With many jealous precautions, he had guarded against the object of his journey being discovered, and even its destination remained unknown to all, but he need not have trembled as far as his niece’s husband was concerned ; it was not in Mr Mannian’s nature to make any enquiries concerning things that he was not desired to know. Nor do I know that he rejoiced very greatly when, after three days’ absence, and after a warning telegram, the invalid carriage set down the little corpse-like figure at his doors again.

Where had Uncle Sarby been during that unwanted excursion? That no one knew, and strange to say, no one even learnt to know. His own servant, doubtless well paid for the occasion, preserved his secret well, and even the pretty housemaid at the vicarage could gain no news from him. The old man himself breathed no word at all of what had passed, and after his return fell back into his invalid existence as before; only for a while, a short while, there could be observed a change now and then in his eyes, like the sudden gleams of an almost expiring candle; and when that while had passed those who listened could often hear him talking to himself in the evenings as he sat alone in his arm-chair, murmuring little courteous phrases that sounded like revivals of the past.

A lovely face haunted uncle Sarby's darkening visions now, but in the confusion of his mind, that face kept mingling with another face of long years before, and the words of complaint, that he had heard, became the old lamentations listened to under the medlar-tree again. It was not always possible to him to distinguish which was real. But the one idea, of which he had once laid hold, kept repeating itself within his mind; and all the more

as other things grew dim, the thought of spiteful triumph became more real to him.

He could be wheeled out now and then, and for him too, the summer days passed by.

And meanwhile—the skies were blue over the great gardens at Landene, and the flowers there made a fire of glorious colours as before. Gardeners were to be seen here and there, the lawns of grass were carefully cut and kept, the windows of the great gray house were open to admit the air and perfumes from without, and to the eyes of strangers there could have been no signs that the master of the place was remaining absent still. Was there much need of him, when in his absence, as in his presence, flowers blossomed always within and without the house; when visitors came in bright dresses and made a liveliness of voices and of laughter; when in the long evenings, Minna wandered in her loveliness about the grounds, with glittering jewels on the neck that her white woollen shawl concealed, a beautiful girl-like figure, like a maiden waiting for the lover who will come?

Indeed, since the time of that unhappy marriage, Minna had never found herself so quietly content;

and her dark beauty bloomed again, more softened now by the expectant wistfulness that her girlhood had not known. There were certain pleasures in the freedom that now belonged to her, the establishment that she could order for herself, the luxuries, unknown before, in the midst of which she lived. If there was indeed something unreal about these things, like little devices by which men cover chains, she tried as best she could to think no more of that. She was lovely still, the society of the neighbourhood had not disowned her, her chosen friends were near, and the day must yet come when her husband would return to her.

The society of the neighbourhood, as might have been expected, had gone through many variations of feeling with regard to her. Lady Creeve was still in her gentle unhappy doubtfulness, and very seldom called; the Marchioness of Claiven had never troubled herself to call at all; and the wives of doctors, of lawyers, and of clergymen had discovered already that Lady Farnim was 'high,' and that there was nothing very much in a social point of view to be hoped from her. Nevertheless, certain impressions in her favour were already beginning to prevail. In spite of all the stories

against her, she maintained her position with dignity ; and excepting some foolish, not very well-founded rumours, with regard to the young man who, after all, was her husband's relation, there was not a word to be alleged against her conduct in her lonely and deserted life. It was well known too, how haughtily always she had rebuffed Sir Hickory Mennet, who affected to disdain her now, though everyone knew he had admired her once.

She went out very little, entertained very quietly, and showed no desire to attract the gentlemen who were only too willing to surround her, so that even the ladies became disposed in time to take her part ; her quiet manner, and wistful loveliness, like that of some imprisoned princess, pleading well for her. Certainly it seemed only too true that she was separated from her husband, but then it might be that she was not to blame for that.

So far then she had succeeded, there were others with whom she had not prevailed so well. Perhaps a certain want of sympathy, natural enough in one who had been brought up to live for herself alone, was against her success ; perhaps a certain dislike to small charities, and a manner that could be hard



and imperious to those whom she did not care to please. Her whole household regarded her as an intruder, and had no great love for her; the people in the village were ready enough to believe any floating rumours that could be told of her. They said she was 'no lady'—the severest judgment that can be heard from the lips of servants or the poor.

And besides these things it must be also owned that in spite of the effect her wistful loveliness produced, and though many ladies were ready to be interested in her, she made no friends at all. She told herself that it was her fate to live alone.

After all, this loneliness, though it oppressed her sometimes, did not usually concern her much or often; except for some partnership in her father's schemes she had been used to be alone through all her life. And Frank's ready help and friendship were always near her now, and even closer were the affection and pitying gratitude that Amy felt for her. She had these things, and the time must come when this solitude would end and she would have the rest as well.

It had now been formally intimated to her that she was to inhabit Landene until that year, which her husband had chosen as the date for his final

return to England. He was at this time in America, where he had many friends. Minna knew these things, and was content to wait.

The summer was lovely round her, the golden evenings had a long luxurious charm, she had acquaintances and friends, her home was large and rich, and the sense of her own beauty was always present to her mind. The restless inward longing was become more still than it had been ; as she wandered alone under the trees in the evening, it seemed to her that she could be happy even yet.

But it was at this time, in the midst of this summer, that a curious event occurred, which, slight as it was, is worth recording here.

Minna had gone up early to her room one evening, having a slight headache, and had dismissed her maid. She was not ill, the little sense of pain was almost luxurious, and she felt inclined to dream. It followed that she fell into an old custom of her girlish days, leaning her head upon her hands, and resting her elbows on the table, whilst the candles burnt on each side of her, and the glass reflected her dark shining eyes and darker falling hair. So Amy saw her, still and dreaming, as she passed the open door, and not

liking to disturb her, went quietly on towards her room. But she had not gone many steps when a violent shriek seemed to tear the darkness, and she rushed back at once.

Minna was standing in the middle of her room, her arms partly extended and rigid, her hair streaming, her face white and wild with horror. 'Don't touch me, don't come near to me,' she cried. And then as Amy came nearer and tried to take her in her arms, she fell down prostrate on the bed, shuddering in an agony that she could not control.

'I heard it again—the pistol shot—I have heard it ever since that day—it came when I was not thinking of it,' she cried. 'Take it away, I am tired of it....and I was not thinking of it....and it may come again.'.....and then came tears and sobs. Amy lay down by her at once, and putting her arms round her as she trembled, tried to soothe her as she could. After a while, Lady Farnim was able to sit up upon the bed, brushing the dark, wet hairs from her eyes, like a half-awakened child.

'I have been very foolish, dear—but you wont leave me; you will sit by me to-night?' she said.

And so Amy sat by her in the great arm-chair through all the night, whilst the candles burnt

lower and lower, observing the dark pictures of ancestors or shepherdesses on the walls, trembling at any imagined fluttering of the gray brocaded curtains, and watching the lovely face upon the pillow, whilst Minna's tired breathing came peacefully, as if she were become a child again. Not until the candles were burnt out and the dawn had grown bright within the room did the companion venture to kiss her softly and retire. She gained no thanks, though she was ill with headache all the succeeding day; Lady Farnim did not always remember to thank those who were round her for the services that they had done.

It was after this, as the summer days passed on, that there came slowly upon her face and manner a decided change—a look of thoughtfulness that had not been there before. She would often remain for hours without speaking, lost in a dreaming meditation from which it seemed hard to her to wake. And yet she did not appear unhappy, she still said that she enjoyed the summer, and she liked to wander in the garden in the evening as she had been used to do. Only she was very much quieter than before.

It had been earlier in the summer time than this,

on a day when Frank was away and Amy had been sent into the town for shopping, that an old, a very old gentleman, as they heard afterwards from the servants, had come as a visitor to the house. They were not told his name. Minna made no reference to the event, and they neither of them thought about it much. Perhaps Lady Farnim did not much think about that visit either, though at the time she had been amused and touched.

She lived quietly on at Landene, received few visitors, and spent many hours alone in the garden with her companion, embroidering in coloured silks, without speaking much. In this manner, for her also the summer days passed by.

And meanwhile—with all the young freshness and innocent gaiety that belong to early years, Frank and Amy had begun together that journey to which they had made up their minds before. Through all the beauty of that glorious summer the thought of that one afternoon, and of those moments of darkness, with the water rushing in their ears, was still before their hearts.

Boy and girl-like, they had been shy of speaking of their feelings to each other, and it needed the greater intimacy in which they were placed that

summer — chiefly owing to Minna's unwonted desire for solitude—to render them able to express themselves in words. Even then they found themselves still compelled to be reserved; though Amy's silent thoughts, struggling now with the burning ignorant desire to help, found delightful support in this disposition that was more genial than her own; whilst Frank, with his greater easiness of mind, was continually preserved from forgetfulness by this childish nature, which, in spite of its childishness, had in it more than he possessed of that stern stuff of which self-sacrifice is made.

'That while in the water has made some things real to me,' he said. But he did not go on to say what things they were.

Perhaps it was easier for Amy to speak, for her words could deal with that more practical part of life towards which she was struggling now. The idea of a sinful sorrowing humanity in need of help—and none the less in need because she was weak and erring too—the thought of One who came once on earth to suffer and to die for it, had come with all its force upon her soul—it was no longer possible for her not to attempt to aid. But

how to begin? It was scarcely possible to exaggerate the difficulties here.

‘People make awful fools of themselves often,’ said Frank, with great candour, ‘when they set to and do good to their neighbours.’

They discussed this matter frequently, sitting together in the garden, or in one of the great drawing rooms in the evening, waiting for Minna, who sometimes kept them long before she came. For when Mr Bortop had any message to send he generally sent Frank over in the evening now. Those long summer evenings, whilst the sweet air lingered amongst the flowers, or came through the windows into the rooms, had a great deal of meaning for them both. But with regard to definite practical action—it was not at all easy to decide.

The desire to help was like a weight upon their minds — on Amy with great earnestness, and on Frank, too, though he was half-amused with her. But it remained very difficult to act. They had neither of them any time or any money, those two levers by which the world is moved. Then Amy had never had the remotest acquaintance with the poor, and the village, as we have seen, was at a distance. Once she spoke on the subject to

Lady Farnim, as they sat alone in the evening, but without any favourable result.

‘I must say I have never been able to go about amongst the poor,’ said Minna. They seem so coarse to me.’

And, though her companion would not assent in words, she felt some inward agreement with the thought. No doubt they were right—from the point of view from which they looked—they had no idea, either of them, what *coarseness* itself can mean when it means the rough hand that you touched in reverent sympathy by the bedside of the child whom your refinement could not save, or the ‘How are you, loove?’ that greeted you with its broad welcome when you walked, a child yourself, beneath the hedge-rows. He who has never felt such things, and felt them, too, as much a part of him, as a bone of his bones, has scarcely known what it is to have acquaintance with the poor.

Amy conveyed to her companion Lady Farnim’s opinion, and in so doing in some measure also revealed her own. Frank heard in silence, and then whistled a little, but said no word at all.

The immediate difficulty of decision remained unsettled still. They both remembered that they



had been saved from death, and agreed that they would like to unite in some thank-offering in that remembrance now. The question of money, however, was not very easy to be solved, for Amy sent always to her mother all of the money she received that she could spare; and Frank, who now received no remittances from his father, did not always find it an easy matter to maintain himself. They resolved then to sacrifice some possessions—some jewellery and books—together with all that Frank could save, and the two pounds that were Amy's present from her father every year ('for the poor child,' said Dr Merse, 'should have a little sum to waste.') That question settled, it remained still to be asked to what purpose the means thus obtained should be applied.

'Promiscuous giving,' said Frank, as if he were speaking out of a copybook, 'makes paupers of the poor. We will send it to the missionaries, and then we shall be safe.'

'But then we shall never know what is done with it,' said Amy, 'they live so far away. We will give it to some poor child that we will find.'

'But why show such favour to one poor child

above the rest? Let us select some deserving charity, and leave the responsibility with that.'

'But there are so many charities to choose from: we shall not know which to choose.'

'Hang it,' said Frank, laughing, 'if we proceed at this rate we shall not advance at all. Come, let us begin by making a mistake; most of the great things in the world begin with that.' But it was not so easy even to discover which mistake to make.

The question was at last suddenly settled; and a few days afterwards Frank left Landene to reside, for a while at least, on that larger estate with an unfinished house that Lord Farnim also owned. He had long been aware that Mr Bortop wished to transfer his services, and remembering always his dispute with his father, was not altogether sorry to depart. He would not be entirely separated from Landene, and would often see it still.

A week before he left he was dining with an old clergyman who had taken a fancy to him, and remembering how short a time remained before his departure, ventured to open his mind on the subject of charities to him. The surprised sympathy with which his remarks were received was rather

enticing, and he had soon told more than he had meant to do. When he had done, the vicar remained for some while silent, stroking his white beard softly with his hand; partly, no doubt, that he might assist reflection by the action, but partly also perhaps that he might cover a smile that was just perceptible at the corners of his mouth.

‘Look here,’ he said, breaking the silence suddenly, and turning on his visitor the gray eyes that still were keen, ‘this gift is for a special occasion, for a remembrance and a thank-offering, is it not? You will both like, then, to have something that you can see afterwards and that remains.’

‘Well, if it were possible,’ said Frank, doubtfully. ‘But that is so difficult to find.’

‘I do not think that it is difficult to find. Look here, I will tell you the first thing that has occurred to me. Some miles off there is a very little church below a hill. I knew the clergyman quite well, he was a friend of mine. It is a poor parish, and he was poor, but he had taken great trouble with the church, and he had set his heart on having the chancel windows filled with painted glass. He had just almost managed this when he died. There is one left, a little window that should be finished to

complete the rest. Only there is no one to pay for it. Will that do for you ?'

'I know,' he added, as Frank hesitated, 'that some would hardly call that an act of charity at all. But life is in need of colours—(as I often say)—and though the parish is so poor, the rough people take an immense amount of pride in this little church of theirs.'

'Oh, but it is not that at all,' said Frank, beginning then to blush. 'It is only—I don't quite like to say it'—blushing yet more hotly; 'the window may be small, but our means are smaller still.'

'You need not trouble at all over that,' the old clergyman replied. 'If you like the idea you shall do all you can, and I will pay the rest. At some future time, when you have made your fortune, you may pay it back to me.'

And in this rather ignoble way the matter was settled at last. It was left entirely in the clergyman's power, but he kept his promise well. The chancel of the little church of Oanham has all its windows painted now. There is one, opposite the organ, that is smaller and has softer colours than the rest. It has only one subject, but many stay to

look at it—the Good Shepherd with the lamb upon his shoulder.

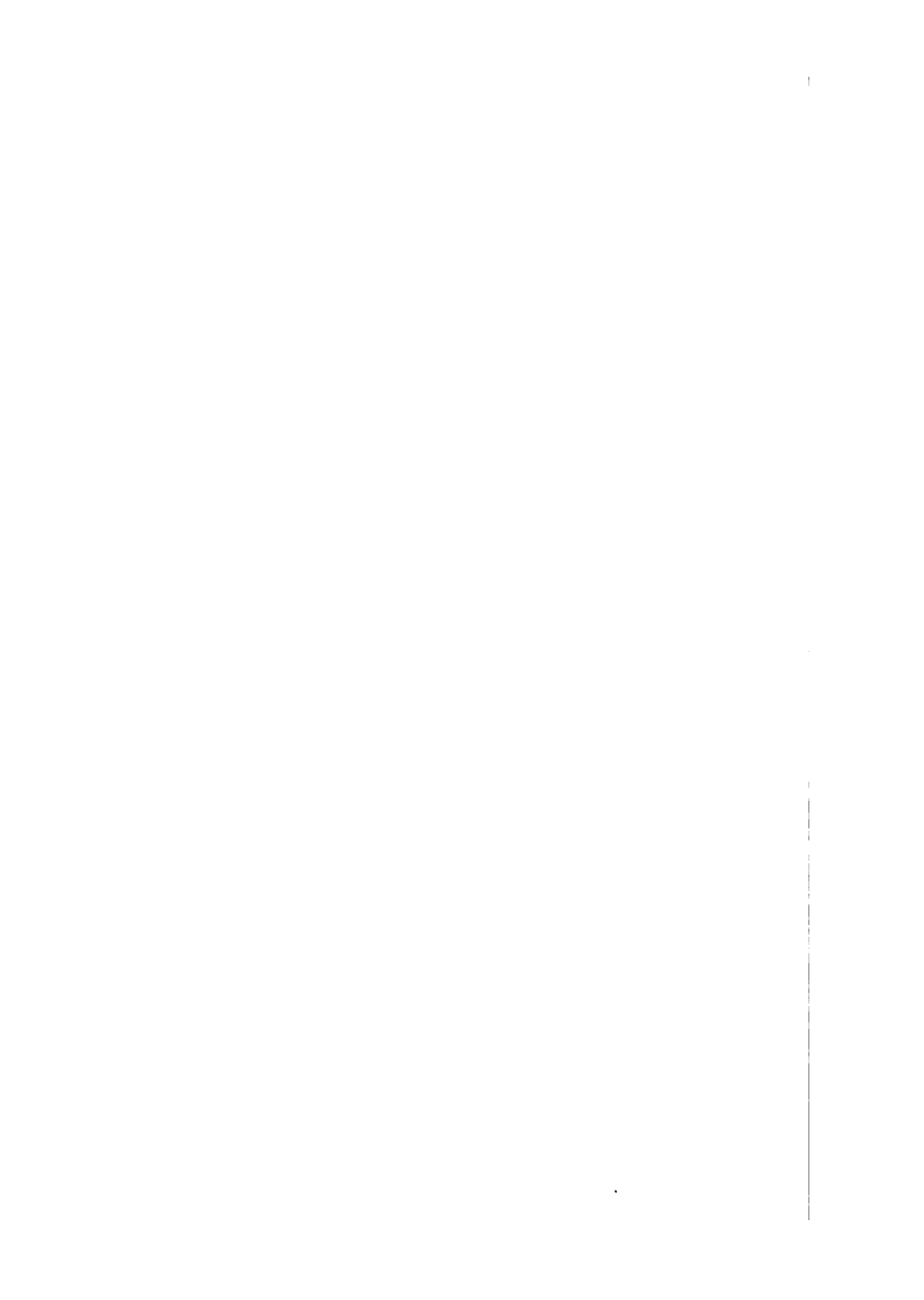
It was a lovely summer's day on which Frank left Landene at last. He came to the house in the afternoon, and sat in the garden with Lady Farnim and Amy, and they had a pleasant time. Some hours after he had gone, in the evening, whilst Minna wandered about the grounds, Amy went into the music room to be alone and see the sunset as she had often done that year. Only there was no sunset to be seen that night. A cold wind had risen, the sky was dark and gray, and the garden lay in shadows and in gloom. It was the last day of August, she had heard that the weather was changing, and a chill seemed to creep round her heart as she thought that the loveliness of the summer might be departing now.

It was the change of the year, indeed, that came that night, and though, after a slow interval, the autumn and the winter passed once more, that golden summer did not return again.

Part Fifth



*A Dark Winter*



## CHAPTER I

THERE are curious tangled threads in the great web of life—there are dark places that we have not light enough to understand. If it were not for that our tales of life would be less hard to tell—we can only touch or tread in these places with timid fingers and cautious footsteps, afraid to explain rashly that which is not clear to us. Beneath our daily actions, our eating and drinking, and our work and play, the spirit-world rests always with its secret remorse or resolutions, its anguish and rapture, its hidden memories, clinging



doubts, and interwoven fancies, the unexplored region of which each must be conscious for himself. We may ignore these things, but they do not exist the less for that.

If we have now to deal with this unexplored region for a while we will, at any rate, speak as little of it as we can.

\* \* \* \* \*

On the fifteenth day of November, nearly three years after that ill-fated wedding, Minna Farnim sat alone within her room. Blinds and curtains were drawn close, for the first snow of the year was falling fast that night.

And as if to rival the snow outside she was all arrayed in white within. She sat now, dressed for the evening, before her table, looking before her at the glass. Her dark hair was arranged like a crown upon her head, and there was a rich deep flush upon the darkness of her cheeks, but diamonds were glistening brightly on her neck, and her dress of silk and swan-down made soft whiteness beneath. It had been her fancy through all the autumn that she would dress herself in white when the first snow should fall that year.

Only not in her wedding dress, that was reserved

for another and greater occasion, for which she was hoping still. In white now for the first time since that day had passed, she wore only one thing that had taken part in the event, the wedding ring that was almost hidden on her hand by the pearls and the diamonds that she wore.

She looked very lovely, slender and graceful, with the womanly charm that can be more beautiful than girlishness; her white robes seemed the fit adornment of a princess, and beneath the dark curves of eyebrows her eyes were shining and lustrous as of old. Only it was scarcely a happy face that looked now as in old times at its reflection in the glass; beneath this visible excitement that was so rare with her, was the weary look, too common with her now, and even with the light of excitement in her eyes there was something of the hunted expression of an animal that is chased and tired. At one moment it might be thought almost that she was frightened, and then at the next the dull weariness possessed her face again.

Oh, she had looked forward to this day, she had longed for it till she had grown tired of longing for it through all the month, this first snow of the winter that was to be a sign that another year of

her solitude was past. She would not have much more than one more year of her lonely waiting now.

And the thought of those months that lay before her did not make her disheartened, she was still prepared to wait. Her husband had been in England once, twice, since that day on which he had parted from his wife, and had then sailed back to America again, but even this had no effect upon her hopes. His visits had been short and hurried, only of a few days each; it was natural that he should have no time for her. In a little more than a year he had determined that he would finally return, and she knew that Mr Grimson would do all he could to bring them together then.

Often and often she had rehearsed this scene that was to come, and in this interval of quiet now she rehearsed it once again, the image of loveliness before her giving new form and colour to her hopes. She would come suddenly into the room when he was not expecting her, when he had never perhaps even suspected she would come, he would be reading quietly with his back towards the door, and he would turn round surprised to her, and she would fall into his arms or at his feet. She would im-

plore him to be just, to have pity on her, to have some mercy now—and he would be hard and cold—and then after a long time he would raise her from the ground into his arms. Often and often before as she rehearsed this scene her eyes had filled with delicious tears as she felt herself in that close embrace at last.

What, then, was the matter with her now, and why in the midst of these visions did that weary look still remain within her eyes? She did not doubt her power—alas, it had failed once, but she did not doubt it now. As she looked as if in questioning upon her face, and saw the lovely straining eyes, full of longing and visions as she looked, and saw too, the pressure that her slender bent hand made against the outline of her cheek, and the movement of the diamonds as her breath coming and going just stirred the softness of her neck; it seemed to her that she could not doubt it now. It seemed to her that if she were a man, and had the right to do it, she could not help but take that face and form into her arms.

One thing only disturbed this, a little thing that yet had power to disturb her as she looked. The diamonds seemed so hard and brilliant on her

arms and neck, they had a flashing brightness, there was nothing at all of softness or of home in them. She took them off and replaced them by the less costly pearls, which had a softer light. And, now, it seemed indeed to her as if all were perfect—fair enough—she need not wish for more.

What could it be that remained to hurt her then? for in the midst of all that consciousness of power, there was still that look of weary sadness within the darkness of her eyes. There must have been some fear remaining there.

Oh, what good would it be to her after all, when all these things were gained, if she must lie awake in the darkness, thinking that she might hear that pistol-shot again? She was always feeling as if she heard it now within her ears—and yet, she dreaded to hear it suddenly once more. It was cruel, it seemed to spoil her hopes; she looked with furtive terror in the glass, and her lips began to tremble like a child's. And it was not her fault—it was not through her he died. . . . .

The first bell rang, and she rose and went down stairs. White, beautiful, with a look of restless misery upon her face, she went through the passages alone; and then with her eyes and lips alight with

smiles, she entered her boudoir, and received her guests. There was a small party at the house that night, which served to give due honour to the just commenced winter and the snow. More ladies than gentlemen had been invited, for Lady Farnim was always careful to show not the smallest preference for men. Besides herself and her companion, there were ten present, about as many as the boudoir would contain. The hostess was charming, they were all in the highest spirits; it seemed to them like the Christmas festivities begun.

Let us imagine that scene in the boudoir that evening—the pale green boudoir, softly lit with lamps, and with pretty paintings of landscapes on the walls, which Lady Farnim had just had newly furnished for herself. The subdued voices and laughter made soft echoing merriment through all the room, there was no want of liveliness or conversation here.

Amy was upon a seat apart, entertaining an old gentleman who was very deaf, and who was therefore somewhat neglected by the rest. A glance from Lady Farnim's eyes had ordered her to this service and she fulfilled it well, though perhaps there was a little wistful wish to be free from it

within her own. Slight, delicate, rather older in expression than before, though she was childish still, with her hair softly crimped round her pretty head, the rows of white beads round her throat, and her dress of white and gray making fit adornment for her young soft arms and neck, she made as fair a sight to be seen as could be wished. There was an expression of thoughtful gravity upon her face, she kept her pretty head bent, and talked in the low clear tones that could make her neighbour understand.

Frank, the observed of all observers, and yet rather conscious of that quiet corner all the same, was upon an ottoman near the door against the wall, talking to three ladies at once, his dark blue eyes flashing brightness with the nonsense that he spoke. He was staying for a while with Mr Bortop since there was much business to be done, and whenever he could be present at Lady Farnim's parties he was always a much-welcomed and a very useful guest.

The rest of the company had disposed themselves as best they could about the room, the three other ladies, dowagers all, and magnificently dressed, were talking of their ailments and their servants in

a row; the two other gentlemen were one on either side of Lady Farnim where she sat. Minna was upon the centre ottoman, talking to those who were next to her, but looking with the light of her dark eyes on all the room, a princess in her white robes amongst them all. The subdued voices and the soft low laughter made a ceaseless pleasantness of sound, to those present it seemed as if there had been no brighter evening in the year.

And then—it is not quite so easy to relate the rest.

Looking up once in a pause in the conversation that the deaf gentleman somewhat too ceaselessly maintained, Amy saw that Lady Farnim, seated still on the centre ottoman, was listening earnestly to some words said by the young barrister who sat by her, and that the other gentleman who had been near her had risen and was standing by the ladies near the door. The minute afterwards, chancing to look up again, she saw Lady Farnim also rise, and observed her leave the room. She went on then with her conversation as before.

Some while after, as she was sitting by one of the dowagers, who had wished to speak to her, she thought with a sudden remembrance that Minna



had not yet returned. That seemed strange, for she did not often leave her guests, still some unexpected cause might have detained her, and it was best to take no notice—she went on talking as before.

The minutes still passed on, the conversation and the subdued laughter continued, but Lady Farnim remained absent still. Amy began to feel nervous, and her heart began to stir with quicker throbs, she was not quite certain what to do. The young barrister had come close to her, and was talking to the magnificent dowager in the purple silk, this allowed her a little interval to think. If she were to go and find Minna it was possible that she might vex her—she had often vexed her in that way before. Still it was also possible that Minna might be ill, faint, in some real need of help. She began to feel timid, her overcoming nervousness (less usual with her now) made her hands turn cold and the lights begin to be unsteady before her eyes. If she could only be braver and more able to decide.

Trembling a little still, she rose softly and with caution from her seat. The young barrister was talking eagerly to the dowager—they paid no heed to her. With timid footsteps she went across the

room, but as she passed the open door Frank rose quietly and came to her side.

'Hallo,' he whispered, as he stood by her in the passage, 'are you deserting too? We shall have no one left to entertain us now.'

'Oh, Mr Mannian, do please go back and keep them talking still. I must go and see where Lady Farnim is.'

'You tell me I am too fond of company,' said Frank; 'what makes you send me back to the frivolities again?'

'Oh, please, be kind, for I am so afraid that Minna may be ill; I must go and see, though she may not be pleased with me. Be good-natured, please, to-night for once.'

'Is this to be one of the new beginnings we talked about?' said Frank, for they had exchanged some quiet words before the guests arrived. She answered him only with one of her shy dark glances, and then turned away. He followed her for an instant with his eyes, and then went back and entertained the guests again.

And Amy went on alone through the passages, her heart beating fast, though she told herself that she had no cause for fear. She had no candle,

the passages were dark and silent, there seemed a brooding dread in them and in her heart, and her footsteps came more distinctly than she liked. Finding her way as best she could through the darkness, she reached Lady Farnim's door at last . . . .

A few minutes afterwards she was standing by the open boudoir door, looking in with timid glances, and shivering a little as she stood without. The whispering, laughing groups did not seem to have altered much, and the lights were shining on the pale green satin as before. But Frank must have been waiting near, for he came out to her at once.

'Well?' he said, looking down upon her as she stood in the passage by his side.

'Oh, what shall we do? I am so afraid that something is wrong,' and her lips began to tremble into tears. Then controlling herself, for she was ashamed of this weakness before him, she went on as steadily as she could.

'I went into her room; there was the night-lamp there, but it was all quite dark besides. Then Norris came in, she had been in the dressing-room, she was so frightened, I never saw her at all like

that before. She said Lady Farnim had come up all at once into her room, and had thrown herself upon her knees by the bed, and then that she had got up suddenly and gone downstairs. She had followed her a little way, but she was so frightened that she did not dare go near to her. Only after she stood still on the stairs she heard her footsteps going down. And then she heard the front door open and shut, and she thinks she must have gone outside the house. She was in her evening dress, she had made no change in that at all.'

'Out of doors, on such a night as this?' said Frank.

'She thinks she must be there.'

They stood side by side, irresolute, looking down upon the ground. The voices and the laughter went on still within. Then he roused himself suddenly, and spoke. 'Come Amy,' he said, 'we will say nothing, and make no noise at all. But we will just go down and set about exploring for ourselves.' He went on downstairs, and she followed, only too glad to leave the deciding responsibility to him.

At the bottom of the broad low stairs, where a bronze figure held a gleaming lamp, he stood still, and as she came to his side he spoke to her again.

‘I am glad it is only old Norris who saw,’ he said, ‘because she is, at any rate, so deep and quiet. She and Crothan are the only two servants who are fit to be trusted in the house. I will go and find him, and then we will get a lantern, and forage a little in the snow. This may be all a trouble about nothing after all. Hallo ! there is someone surveying us above.’

It was the young barrister, who now descended the stairs and came to them.

‘I beg your pardon, Mannian,’ he said, as he joined them, ‘but I thought I heard your voice below, and the temptation then became too strong for me. Is Lady Farnim ill, or has anything gone wrong? Do tell me, because if it be so, we had better all of us retire at once.’

‘I am afraid Lady Farnim may be ill,’ said Frank, who knew his companion, and after a rapid, reluctant consideration had resolved how much to tell. ‘But to say the honest truth we are not quite certain where she is. They say she went out into the garden. I am afraid she may have gone out feeling ill or faint, and then have fainted there. You were talking to her, did she seem ill to you?’

‘I thought it was a little queer,’ said the young man, almost in a whisper, and descending a step that he might be near them where they stood. ‘She turned so white all at once, I could not tell what had gone wrong with her. I was telling her of a murderer I once saw—perhaps that made her ill. I should not have been uneasy about her if I had not seen her change like that.’

Then coming nearer still, so that his hand touched Frank’s arm, and in low tones that could be heard by him alone, ‘You look disturbed. Can I help you—has anything gone wrong?’

‘Not that I know of,’ said Frank, in the same tone, ‘but I feel rather uneasy in my mind; I am afraid Lady Farnim must be ill. But we will not tell the others till we are sure, Cavart’——

The eyes of the young men met, but they said no further words. They had seen each other for the first time two days before, but there is nothing more rapid (or more slow) than the growth of trust can be.

Voices came towards them, the old butler was talking to the lady’s-maid. But the stately Norris, dimly seen in the gloom of the inner hall, retreated as she saw them, and the old man advanced to them

alone. Frank went aside and spoke a word or two to him. And, meanwhile, Amy, with her fair head bent, and the young thin man, stroking his dark moustache, stood still without looking at each other beneath the bronze figure and the stairs.

And then Crothan had brought a lantern, and they all went together to the hall. It was brightly lighted, the dark pictures looked down upon them from the walls. Amy felt as if she saw it dimly, a sense had come upon her as if she were moving in a dream. The old butler went forward, moving softly, and opened the door. It seemed like a picture to be vividly impressed upon the mind, the great stone-paved lighted hall, the open doorway, and the light streaming out upon the darkness and the snow.

The night was all blackness, and the snow lay deep, but it was not snowing now. By the door upon the steps, the marks left by the footsteps of the guests had been almost effaced; the young men bent down to discover if there were any other traces to be found. Amy came close behind them, and Frank turned round to her.

‘Oh—you had better not come with us,’ he said.

‘Oh, let me come.’

The passionate entreaty of her voice could only be expressed in a whisper, but it found expression there. Frank looked doubtfully at her for an instant, and then moving hastily back into the hall seized a great fur-lined cloak that lay upon a chair and wrapped it round her, for she was shuddering with cold, and seizing also some fur-lined shoes forced them over the satin slippers on her feet. Mr Cavart had come near to them again, and was considering them with some attention and surprise. But there was no time to wait; the old man with the lantern went before, and they all went out together into the night.

As the door closed, the blackness of the night seemed to enclose them as they stood. The steps were covered with snow, the lantern made a faint gleam in front of them. Beneath, the snow lay deep, but bending down the young men thought they could discover some footsteps amongst the other half-effaced traces that horses and carriages had left. And then they all went on into the blackness of the night.

They had not far to go. The old butler had gone on first with the lantern; a little way down the drive he stopped, and they all came up to him.



Then they all stood still, not daring to move or speak. There upon the ground, with her hair dark against its whiteness, lying upon her face, without covering for her neck, with her arms, on which the pearls shone, clasped above her head, Lady Farnim lay stretched upon the snow.

They stood still, and did not move or breathe; the blackness of the night was round them, the gleam of the lantern was upon her as she lay. Then Frank made an effort, and stooped and touched her gently with his hand; she moaned low, but did not move or speak. The low sound gave him courage, he stooped again, and lifted her from the ground into his arms.

Silently, as if they had been a funeral procession, they all went back into the house. They entered by a side door, Cavart went back to the guests, and Frank carried Lady Farnim to her room, where he laid her down upon the bed. She made no sound except some moaning once. No servant had met them in the passages. Crothan fetched Norris silently, and Frank and Amy went back into the boudoir, and dismissed the guests; except Norris and the four who had found her, no one had any idea of what had passed.....

All through that night Amy sat watching in Lady Farnim's room, whilst the night lamp made a feeble glimmer, and the dark figures seemed to move upon the walls. Her head was confused, and her eyes were burning with fatigue; it seemed to her as if they were all in the darkness, and there were no escaping now.

## CHAPTER II

BUT such darkness has tides like the sea, it does not overwhelm us all at once.

During the next few days it began to be rumoured in the village that Lady Farnim was ill, in bed, that the doctor had been sent for, that she had been taken suddenly ill during a party she had given. The news occasioned much attention and interest, but not very much of sympathy. For between two and three years now Minna had been a resident at Landene, never leaving it except for a few days or weeks in London or at the seaside ; but

she was still almost unknown in the village, where many of the people had never even seen her face. Still the news gave rise to many remarks—some spoke about ‘a judgment’; others wondered if Lord Farnim would be returning now. It was of the sudden illness, the illness in the midst of the party, that they spoke—that scene in the snow, the darkness, the night-time did not enter into their minds or thoughts at all.

There was one, indeed, from whose mind it was never absent, but he said no word about his thoughts. Frank Mannian had grown older now, he understood that there was danger that the strange scene which had occurred might be supposed to have reference to him. Yet he was consumed with anxiety, and none the less so because he felt himself compelled to silence—those long days whilst he heard no news of Lady Farnim, and whilst his whole time was occupied with the daily work of various sorts that filled his days, were like an inward fever, intolerable in its restlessness to him. They served to show him, too, with a sense like new surprise, how much he had learnt to lean upon that other companion who shared his thoughts with him. But he dared not

make any attempt to see her, and he let the days pass on.

He heard that Lady Farnim was better, that she was downstairs, though she could receive no visitors as yet. The dark days of November passed on in fogs and gloom. And then one morning, when he was not expecting it, there came a note for him.

It was in Minna's handwriting, changed and trembling now. Hastily written, without any formal beginning or end, a few words told all it had to say. She begged him to see her, there was something she had to tell him, and she wished to speak to him alone.

Such a request could only have one answer, he set out through the fog-wreathed park at once. As he went he almost wondered at the relief that filled his mind. He felt that he probably would not be permitted to see Amy, but it might perhaps be well to-day that he should speak to Lady Farnim alone.

When he arrived at the house he was taken upstairs, and to her room at once. There he was left alone with her. She was in the little boudoir opening into her dressing room, in a white morning wrapper, leaning upon pillows, pale, shrunken, her

dark eyes looking out from hollows, a ghost of herself that yet was lovely still. As he took the thin brown hand she held out to him he felt almost as if he could have given way to tears.

No words came from either, and unasked he sat down upon a chair. There he sat silent, bent a little towards her, with his young dark glance upon her, whilst her eyes looked languidly at him—a young physician, all prepared to help. That older feeling was warning him meanwhile that in this interview there was imprudence, but he saw no help for that.

There was a silence, and then she spoke in weak and trembling tones.

‘You have come—you know why I have sent for you.’

He was silent still, his heart beating with a nervousness to which he was not accustomed, and that deprived him of the power of speech. Then after a little while she spoke again, in tones more trembling still.

‘It has been very terrible for me.’

‘I know that,’ he answered gently, hoping that the quiet assent might soothe. There was another interval, and then she spoke once more.

‘If it was not that I—I feel so wrong’— she said, whilst her lips began to tremble like a child’s, ‘I think I could bear it if it was not for that. It is that weight upon my mind—I should so like it if you could help me—I feel so miserable—’ and then she stopped.

‘He said it—the man who was with you, when you found me,’ she went on at last, as he waited still for more. ‘He was speaking of the man he went to see, who was going to be killed for what he had done, who said, “I have had the doom of God upon me, but I am past it now”—And then I felt—it was on me—I did not know what to do—I ran to my room, and fell down upon my knees—and then it all came back on me again; it said, “Praying so comfortably here!” And I felt as if my room was soft and warm, as if God would not hear me there, as if I must go out into the snow or into the fire, and He would hear me then—And then I ran out into the snow, and it was cold, cold, and I hid my face, and I felt that I could pray—And then you found me there—and the cold seems like burning fire in me, and I am so afraid of being ill—and the weight is still

there, and I thought that if I could tell you, you might help.'

Her voice ceased, but its low passionate entreaty seemed to be echoing still within the room. Frank remained silent, looking still at her, an expression of gravity and misery upon his face. It was strange that she scarcely seemed to need his words; perhaps the outward expression of her trouble gave relief, or perhaps it was soothing enough to know that his sympathy was near. She covered her eyes with her hand, a thin hand, and remained silent for a while.

'Mr Mannian,' she said, lowering her hand, and looking at him with steady earnest eyes, 'If you felt that you had done wrong—that a wrong was on you—and that you could not help it—what would you do?'

'I cannot tell,' said Frank.

He spoke as usual the first words that came into his head, without waiting to consider whether others more suitable might be found. The sense of this, the instant after, almost made him smile, but there was no smiling in the eyes that looked at him.

'I cannot tell, indeed,' he said, more earnestly;



'but I think—at least I hope—I should try to do better.'

'But if it was a great wrong, a crime, and you could not help it now?'

'I should have all the more reason for trying to do better then.'

'But if it was worse than all of that, if it was terrible, if some one had died through you, what would you do?'

There was no mistaking the agonized earnestness within her voice and eyes. For one long despairing instant their eyes met. Then Frank grew very red, and turned his face away.

'I think I should try to remember that Someone died once for the sake of me,' he said. And then for a longer while there was a silence in the room.

'I say, I should think all these things, you know,' he said, his honesty impelling him to this confession now; 'I daresay I should never think of them at all. I daresay I should go out and hang myself—that is the action that comes easiest to us all.'

Again there was silence, and she looked down upon the ground.

‘Frank, you say what you think,’ she murmured, with one faintest smile at last. ‘You are better than a clergyman to me.’

Then after a while, whilst her thin brown fingers began to twist upon her knee:

‘How could I help it—I never pretended that I cared for him,’ she said. ‘It seems so long ago—it hurts my head when I try to think about it now. Only that sound of a pistol, it keeps on going still within my ears. He told me he loved me—he used to tell me often that he had learnt the cards for me—he did not like the life, he would have given it up, I could have made him give it up if I had chosen then. But my father, he wished me to keep him on—and I did not care—and then he killed himself and died. It was in the morning—I had come home from a party, and was sitting before the glass—and then I heard the shot.’

Frank shuddered and was silent, turning his face away. A horrible repulsion was beginning to grow on him, he longed to leave this house, this woman who had tempted men, and so deserting her to leave her to the fate she had deserved. But when he turned again and met the haggard eyes with which she looked at him, his compassion began to grow

once more within his heart. Her eyes were appealing, full of her own suffering, there was no thought in them that there could be anything but pity for her in his mind.

‘If you could help me,’ she murmured low at last. And he answered gravely without delaying now.

‘I have told you the best—try and think of it; I can say no more than that.’

‘And you think—this weight—I need not have it—it is not right I should.’

‘I am sure you need not. Try and think that too. We punish ourselves when we have such thoughts as those. They are not the will of God; He is too good to us for that.’

Again there was silence, whilst she kept her eyes upon the ground. Then she raised them at last, looking more quietly at him.

‘Thank you. You help me,’ she said. She held out her thin hands, and he took them in his strong young clasp. It seemed pleasant to him, that thought that he could help. She lay back with closed eyes, and he left the room, and left the house at once.

Afterwards, pacing for long hours up and down his room that night, he wondered and doubted,

and went over again in his mind the words that he had said—the agony in her dark eyes always before him as he thought, the longing to help still further growing like craving pain within his heart. It seemed to him as if he must see her, speak to her, he had not said enough to give any reality of help. But that opportunity, once passed, did not return again.

Indeed, it is not easy to deal with—this strange fever that now and again seizes with its burning pain our modern life, driving its victims into the river or the fire, forcing them into self-torture to escape the deeper woe. We no longer call these things outbursts of piety, or exaltations of saint-hood; we beg of such enthusiasm to control itself, to take a little tea, and to try to calm its nerves; we deal with it as with the childish folly that our greater wisdom should be able to control. Nevertheless, whilst the mystery of hidden anguish remains as much a fact as in the old times when it drove its victims to wear out their knees upon the stones, there will still be found those who will be ready to rush out into the snow and into the night-time, trusting to find in cold and darkness the lesser torment of the two.

Amy had hard times during the days and weeks that followed, whilst Lady Farnim slowly advanced to a partial recovery from the shock that night had caused. It was not that she was asked to help, or asked to nurse, for no such requests were made of her, no advice was demanded from her, and she was not even allowed to feel that she had much power to help. But for hours and hours each day she remained alone with Lady Farnim in her room, watching the drooping lashes and the sunken head, not daring to speak for fear she should disturb her thoughts, not daring to be silent lest she should assist the depression that she saw—always blamed, or treated with a weary despondent patience whichever course of action she pursued. Such days and weeks have a great effect upon the young; her face began to appear older, and to assume a look of womanly sadness that it had not worn before. It was well for her that she had begun to gain now what she had not known at home—a faint sense of that wider vision which sees the outside world beyond domestic trials.

What were Lady Farnim's own thoughts during those long weary silent days, none ever knew. Of

that secret anguish that had burnt within her heart, she spoke no word again.

On the contrary as the days went on her wan face began to brighten as with returning hope, and she said now and then to Amy that she had an inward conviction, she felt quite sure she should see her husband now. She had never spoken of him to her companion before, and Amy wondered in silence, but dared speak no word at all.

She had narrowly escaped a dangerous illness, so the doctor said, but she had escaped it, and that seemed enough for her. As time went on her dark eyes began to fill with their old light, her lips to tremble into smiles to greet the clergyman when he came, and by fits and starts her old manner to return to her. Yet when she was alone with her companion she remained silent still.

Those returns to her old gaiety were never more conspicuous than when Frank came to them. His visit to Mr Bortop would soon be drawing to a close, and excusing himself on the plea of business he did not often come, but when he was there Minna seemed always bright and pleased with him. Amy, watching and silent, with something like a little pang at her heart of which she would not

think, often wondered if he knew what a change took place in the lady of the house as soon as she found herself alone.

There was one of these occasions, a mere trifling conversation, arising from a foolish joke, that she had cause to remember afterwards on account of the effect and alteration it produced.

They were all together in the great drawing-room, Frank standing, ready to go, by Lady Farnim's chair, discussing the decorations on which the servants' minds were bent. It was the day before Christmas Eve, and the ground was white with snow. Amy had spoken timidly of holly-berries; Frank was very much enchanted with a great branch of mistletoe that he had seen.

'I must find that in a conspicuous position when I come back,' he said.

Minna, who had not been speaking, glanced up at him with a sudden mischievousness in the dark langour of her eyes, 'Are you so ready for that experience?' she asked.

'At any rate,' he said; 'It will be an entirely new experience to me.'

He had spoken without thinking, as usual—a little piqued, and wishing to defend himself from

her remark. But she was seized with one of those uncontrollable fits of laughing that come to weakness sometimes; in peal after peal she laughed, until he blushed like a child and looked down in confusion on the ground. That was one of Amy's remembrances in after-times—the great drawing-room, the handsome young man with his head bent, and Minna, with her dark beauty and her yellow silk dress, looking up at him, with tears and laughter in her eyes.

‘Are you so ignorant?’ she asked.

‘I have had no mother, or aunt, or sister,’ said Frank, trying hard to rally, and to treat the whole affair with the seriousness that does not admit of mirth. ‘I had an old nurse once, and that is all.’

‘But you had your father,’ said Amy, with a little reproach within her tone.

‘My father? Yes; certainly I had.’

‘And did he never—teach you?’ asked Minna, still looking at him with tear-filled eyes, in which mischief lingered yet.

‘Do you mean did he ever kiss me? Never, that I can remember. He was in his study, I did not see much of him.’



‘But, I suppose, he sent for you to see you there sometimes.’

‘Oh, yes; he sent for me whenever he wanted to give me a flogging.’

‘But if he never saw you, how did he know when you needed that correction?’

‘Oh—my uncle used to tell him that I was impertinent, or the neighbours complained that I chased their cocks and hens.’

‘It was very kind of him to take that trouble,’ Minna said.

‘Very kind.’

‘But you are very much in want of instruction still. You ought to learn at once,’ and with a wicked look she glanced at Amy as she spoke. Amy turned pale with sudden vexation, and cast down her eyes. Minna looked from her to Frank, who had flushed and pressed his lips together with a hurt, indignant expression. The feelings she had awakened seemed somewhat deeper than the little coquetry or petulance she had expected. With a sudden movement she got up and left the room.

When she returned she found the young people sitting close together, talking low and eagerly, with the freedom that is without restraint in their

tones. Amy's fair head was turned towards her companion, and he was laughing brightly down at her. A curious change passed over Minna's face like sudden darkness, and she came up to them.

'You say you are coming here to-morrow,' she said with strange abruptness, addressing herself to Frank.

'You asked me, I think,' he answered quietly, as he rose.

'Oh—I believe I did; but I am afraid I must drive over to Lady Creeve, I shall have no time for you.' He bent his head without surprise, more used by this time to her caprices than he had been, and took his leave at once. The next day he did not come, but Lady Farnim did not drive to Lady Creeve—she had changed her mind, she said.

A curious change! whose effects did not pass away when that slight whim had gone. Perhaps to those who did not see her often there was little alteration to be seen, but Amy, watching always by her side, observed the change with fear. In those times she was restless and irritable in manner, breaking often into sudden tears, and moaning that no one cared for her. She no longer seemed to wish to see the bright companion who had been so

long her friend, but she kept Amy always at her side, exacting from her a ceaseless course of attention, and affection, of the caresses even she had not desired before. And at the same time that she kept her so constantly with her she scarcely permitted her to speak to any other human being, and allowed her, so far as was possible, no other companionship at all. The exact causes of this alteration her companion could not know—but one effect of it, at least, she felt as she found herself separated more and more from Frank.

And so, as the days passed on, there began to grow a slow sadness in her heart. Her life was monotonous and weary, the constant strain of it seemed more than her health could bear, and yet she shrank from the thought that she might be compelled to renounce it, and to return once more to the duties in her home. She found herself entirely unable to speak to the companion for whom she had cared—they could no longer discuss together the spiritual schemes that they had formed, or innocently relate to each other the little kind actions they had done. And, separated in this manner from him, she began inwardly to question her motives to herself, and to dread lest

she should have mingled with her religion some other feelings she had no right to entertain. By nature and force of habit she kept faithful to the resolutions they had made—inquiring after the headaches of the lady's-maid, or laboriously speaking a shy word or two to the old rheumatic gardener at his work—but there were moments when the fervour seemed to have gone out of these things too, and she found herself in danger of sinking entirely into gloom.

And, meanwhile, Frank kept steadily and constantly away, separated from her by inward storms of feeling of which he gave no word or sign at all. The words of Lady Farnim had not been without effect on him; he knew now he must try and keep himself apart. It is probable that those winter months were not months of peace to him.

They went on slowly, and the year began once more. It began in snow and darkness; it was a harder winter than many years had known.

### CHAPTER III

THAT dark winter-time was like a dream to Amy—a long, slow dream that was in no haste to end.

Afterwards she remembered with strange distinctness the white still days with the snow lying heavily on the trees, the leaden skies that seemed to be pressing downwards like a weight, the intense whiteness and wide solitude of the park. Everything was still, there was no movement in the clouds, no stirring in the white boughs, the brooding heat of a summer's day could scarcely have had such heaviness of silence. Now and then there

were fierce storms, in the night-time chiefly, that tore away the branches from the trees ; but, for the most part, one day succeeded another in stillness, and the snow fell slowly and in silence when it came.

Amy had been allowed no Christmas-time at home this year, for Lady Farnim insisted on keeping her always at her side. She needed the relief of the change ; the monotony of the long silent days, scarcely lightened by the dread of some delirious outbreak, pressed like a constant strain upon her heart. The dread was not fulfilled ; day after day passed, and they worked through long hours at their embroidery, or sat reading in silence, or went out together in the snow, and still nothing happened to disturb the calm that reigned as their weeks went on together side by side. The white days passed slowly onwards, and the long winter wore itself out at last. But the strangest part of that winter was that it seemed to remain when it had gone, and that whilst all the leaves were budding for the spring, Amy seemed to see still the white world and the gray clouds before her eyes. That may have been from that curious effect upon the eyes which makes us see still before

us that which we have seen for long, or it may be that the shock of that one night had left lingering consequences on her mind. In after times when she tried to think of the year that followed, it was always rather of that winter time she thought.

And yet the year that followed for her companion and herself must have had its meaning too. Minna became more cheerful as the spring advanced into beauty, and showed some animation over her spring dresses, though even that animation seemed rather like a reflection of the past. She was not melancholy, she was hopeful and very quiet, with the light of a constant expectation in her eyes. But those eyes seemed larger, clearer, and more lustrous than they had been; she fell more often into silence than had once been usual to her; and though the change in her was not perceptible to all, to her constant companion she appeared altered still.

She no longer wandered alone now in the garden in the evenings, she liked to keep Amy always with her at her side. And often when she did not speak to her she would hold her hand and smile. Absorbed as she was in the fears that had come with the darkness of the winter, it took Amy some time

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to realise that the advancing year meant to her companion the continual approaching of a hope.

Sometimes she tried to influence that companion with regard to the various subjects on which she had thought so much. But Minna could not be persuaded to take any interest in the poor; she gave a little more readily now to local charities, and that was all.

Frank wrote now and then to Lady Farnim, but his letters were not very cheerful in their tone. He said that his uncle was dying slowly, and he said also that his father was ill, but he did not speak much of either. He was more ready to tell of his work; Amy fancied that he was not very willing to say much about his home. Lady Farnim mentioned her own father once or twice—she said he was ill and broken, and had gone back to Germany, but she made no lamentation over his absence.

So the year wore on, and the trees became beautiful round the house, and they went away for a while to London, and came back and went to Brighton, and then returned to Landene again—and the summer passed onwards like the spring.

Amy did not know why it was that, with the advancing year, there grew always the conviction



that this would be her last year in the place, or why it seemed slowly to become natural to think as she looked at the trees that she might not see them in their summer foliage there again. Perhaps this might be due to a general feeling, so universal that it found some sort of expression on all sides, which believed that when the next year came Lord Farnim would most certainly return. It seemed as if Lady Farnim believed this as well; and as time went on, drawn into sympathy with her, Amy found her own heart beating quicker with the expectation too.

The endless winter did not mean an endless year, the months passed as quickly as they came. The spring grew brighter into summer, the summer failed into autumn, and still the days went by. The autumn winds seemed to try Lady Farnim's strength as they had not done before; she grew thinner, and her eyes became yet more large and clear. That oval softness of charms was beginning to depart from her face, there were delicate hollows now in the outline of her cheeks. But her features had gained a gentle and melancholy grace, and Amy whispered often to herself that when Lord Farnim

came home there would only be need for him to see his wife.

So the autumn slowly drifted into winter and there were gray clouds and snow, and to the anxious watcher the old fears began to return again. But Minna remained always calm, though there was the brightness of a slowly approaching hope in her eyes, and the time drew onwards towards the second Leap-Year.



Part Sixth



*The Second Leap Year*



## CHAPTER I

ELEVEN—twelve—

Amy counted the last two strokes almost aloud, she had heard the other ten within her dream. It seemed as if it was only an instant since she had gone to sleep, praying with childish tears that the next year might be good—if it might be, happier than the last had been. And, now, waked by some sound that she did not know from that strange dream of a black and shrouded figure close to her, she heard the clock striking in the year.

Ah! that sound again, the movement of fingers

on the latch. She sat up horror struck in her bed. All was stillness; the night lamp was burning in the room.

‘Amy!’

In an instant she had left her bed, but even as she did so the door opened, and Lady Farnim entered the room.

By the dim light Amy could see her as she came, a dark figure like the phantom in her dream. She was partly dressed, her hair was loose, and a dark fur-lined cloak hung on her shoulders. Her face was pale, her eyes large and dilated; as she leant back trembling against the bed, Amy knew that in the loneliness of the night-time the old terror was returning once more.

Minna stood still by her and spoke; her voice was very sweet and low, and there was the softness of a smile within her eyes. Her companion was trembling beyond all power of words.

‘Come, dear . . . I want you to come to church, and pray with me.’

Amy heard the words, but there was a ringing in her brain that prevented her from understanding them at first. And then, all at once, and in what manner she knew not, there came a sudden

calmness in her mind—she felt that there was danger, that there was no one near, and that it rested with her alone to do the best she could. Before that feeling of responsibility the sense of terror left her, it was for her to act, and she must try her best to help.

‘In church, dear? Out of doors on this cold night?’ she said.

She looked on her companion with a smile, she tried to think herself strong, in order that she might be more able to control. But there was a dreadful calmness in the eyes that met her own; if they had been full of unconsciousness, or of madness, there would have been more hope for her.

‘I know,’ Minna whispered low. ‘But I will never be—like this—again.’

It seemed as if she understood, and as if her understanding made her more determined still. She seemed under some overmastering impulse against which she had no power to fight.

‘It is only this time—New Year’s morning—I must go and say one prayer that my husband will come back. If I do not say it I feel as if he would not come back at all. And then I will never be



like this again ; I will try to be good, and I will be very quiet and wait.'

'But you will wait now—you will let me call others, or at least get dressed myself.'

'The time is going, going,' wailed Minna, putting her hands up to her head. And Amy began to dread that the old terrible excitement would return. Hastily she seized her things, and began with trembling fingers to prepare herself. Minna walked up and down, wringing her hands, in an agony of impatience that every moment of delay increased. Before more than a minute or two had passed she turned hastily and moved towards the door. Amy rushed after her, and was in time to catch her by the arm.

'Oh, what are you doing? Will you not wait for me?' she said.

'The time is going—going,' wailed Minna, with the same low cry again, and pushing the hair from her forehead with her hands. And Amy saw that her growing excitement could endure no more. There was not a moment to consider. Hastily she threw on her white evening dress which she had left upon a chair, flung a gray ulster over her shoulders, without staying to cover either arms

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or feet, and hastened after her companion who had already left the room. They went down the darkness of the passage side by side.

Then, alone thus in the silent night-time, and hearing only the echoes of their footsteps as they went, Amy had time to think for a moment what she ought to do. The servants' rooms were very far away, she dared not leave her companion that she might go and ask for help. She blamed herself for her weakness, she tried to think that she ought to assume the authority that could command. And then she began to speak, but before she could say a word her companion's breathing began to hurry as if with fever by her side. No, she must not excite her, she must follow and be quiet, it might be that they would meet with others who would have more power to help.

And so they went in darkness through the passages, and went, still in the darkness, down the stairs. Not a sound could be heard, the servants slept quietly above. Amy strained her ears for footsteps or for voices, but there was an absolute silence, they seemed shut in by the silence and the night.

They reached the hall, the darkness was so great

that she had to hold to her companion for support. Minna went quickly, there seemed no doubt and no confusion in her mind. She opened a side door, and they went on through narrow passages again. The darkness was intense, the stone floors were very cold to Amy's feet, and still, through it all, there was a curious heat of excitement at her heart, she kept telling herself, as if she were in a dream, that she was having adventures now. And then she knew that they were standing by a door, and she began to ask herself if they were indeed going out into the night.

If it had not been that she dreaded so intensely to do harm, if the fear of hurting her companion had not taken so strong a possession of her mind, it seemed to her as if she could almost have been calm. But she kept remembering that Minna was delicate, she kept telling herself that she should try to have more strength. She had no fear for herself, even though she was shuddering with cold, but that terror of doing wrong had become almost like an agony to her.

They stood still in the darkness, Minna turned key and bolt, then there came the bitter air upon

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their faces, and before them were the starlight and the snow.

In another instant Amy's arms were thrown round her companion, and she was clinging with all the strength she had to her.

'Minna—dear Minna.'

Lady Farnim gave a low cry that was like a struggle in itself, a strangled cry as if the clasping arms had been grasping at her neck—and then, easily as if no effort were required, she flung back her companion into the passage and was out and in the snow. In another instant Amy was kneeling and clinging to her knees in the snow and darkness of the narrow garden-path in which they were.

'Minna—dear Minna—my Minna, only hear me once. It is madness, you will kill yourself, you do not know the harm you do. Come back home, pray there, let me go and pray alone in the Church for you. You are not strong—strong enough.' She broke down suddenly in sobs. 'Only this once, listen now, and be angry with me then for all your life.'

She ended there, for Lady Farnim, with the sudden movement of putting both hands upon her

face, pushed her violently back upon the snow, and in an instant was lost in the darkness of the path. They were in a path bordered by high dark bushes, above which were the stars in the sky. Amy was just conscious of this, and then she knew that she was by her companion's side again.

'You do not love me,' she whispered, weeping, as she laid a hand upon her arm. You try to leave me, you do not wish to have me near you now.' She had not thought to have an answer, but there came a hoarse, low murmur through the darkness in reply.

'It is because I love you—I thought I could pray better if you were near—but you keep me—you will not let me go—and I must go on or I will die.'

There was an instant's silence, whilst they stood together in the path. And then Amy spoke, clasping both hands upon the arm she held—a few whispered words only that spoke the despairing resolution of her heart.

'Come then, my darling, and I will come with you,' she said. And they went on together through the night.—

The endless silent night! Amy kept telling herself that she was not dreaming, there were

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moments when it seemed as if she must be lying in her bed and imagining these strange things of herself. The park lay white and still, the trees were mysterious under the silence of the stars. Her feet sank in the snow upon the grass, the bitterness of the cold gave stinging pain to them; that burning, at least, was not a dream.

Oh! was it really true, could it be true, that they were alone—here—out-of-doors, scantily dressed, and in the night? Oh, what could be the end—the end—of this? would others think them mad, would the morning come, would there ever be any morning ever at all for them? How strange the park was! . . . silent . . . oh, would God help them even now to escape from this.

What should she do if they reached the village? should she call others, whom should she call, could she dare to ask anyone to see them as they were? Perhaps they could get to the church, pray, come home, and no one would ever know what they had done. How strange the trees were—white, endless, silent—oh, if God would only help them.....

So, as if in a dream, they went together through the park; they reached the plantations that seemed so laden with snow even in the night time; they

went through the dark church-walk towards the road. And then they were in the road, the silent road, where the few houses looked darker than the sky. The stones were sharp, the wind piercing, the stars were above, there was no other footfall—

Ah! the churchyard, with the church standing dark against the stars. They went through the little gate and up the steps—the tombstones were round them; they were standing in the darkness of the porch. And then Amy found all at once that she must let go of the arm of her companion, and then she knew that she had fallen on the ground. The shock roused her, and she rose, trembling and crying, to her feet. She was alone, the wind came in bitterly, the stars were without, but the great doors were open at her side. She looked out once, with a silent prayer, towards the stars, and then went boldly into the blackness of the church.

There was no light, but she seemed from beyond to hear a moaning sound. She groped her way onwards as she could, taking hold of the pillars as she passed them. Over and over again she had to tell herself she was awake, it seemed as if she must be lying in her bed and dreaming that she was in the darkness of the church. She found her

way to the chancel steps, the moaning growing near as she advanced, she struck her head against the lectern as she passed it, in another instant she was on her knees by the side of the other figure by the rails.

There—where through those troubled years she had so often knelt before, pouring out her troubles and her thoughts, where with the childish faith the child's sure help had come; it seemed as if here she was at rest. She laid her head down upon her arms weeping bitterly—crying for the the terror and the darkness, for pain and loneliness, for outcast souls so lost in their sin and in their misery, that they could be weaker than herself. The words came like a breath between her lips.

‘Oh, Lord Jesus, help’——

And even as they passed she heard the sound of footsteps, and raising her face she saw a light gleaming in the darkness.

It came nearer, advancing with the footsteps up the aisle. It was a lantern, a young man held it, his hair was dark, he had remembered to take off his hat, she observed these things vacantly at first. And then, with a sudden cry of recognition, she started to her feet.



‘Amy, why Amy, what brings you here?’ he said.

He had no time to say more, for in an instant she was clinging to his coat, shuddering and trembling, grasping at it, as if it meant safety, with her hands. For one instant as he reached the chancel steps he had seen those two figures, the dark one kneeling and bending by the rails, the half-risen one with the fair face all wrinkled with the light and with surprise. And now he knew that she was grasping and weeping on his heart. For one delicious moment Amy could only be sensible of rest.

He put her gently away from him, and seated her down upon the step, placing the lantern by her side. And then, moving a little, he bent softly down towards the other figure where she lay, dark and motionless, with her face buried in her hands.

‘Lady Farnim.’

She gave no word or movement, save that he thought he could see a little trembling as she lay. Amy had risen and stood by him, quite quiet and composed, though the tears were still rolling down her face.

‘How did you come here, how did you know we were here?’ she whispered. It seemed natural to

whisper in that dimly lighted darkness of the church.

‘It was Norris—she felt uneasy and looked into Lady Farnim’s room,’ he whispered back. ‘And then she looked for you, and she was dreadfully frightened, and called Crothan, and he went with a lantern through the park to me. It was just a chance, if anything is a chance, that I came back to-day, and that he knew I did. And Norris had once heard her speak something of praying on New Year’s morning in the church, and so I sent him back and came on here alone. You are glad to see me, are you not? How is it that you came here with her?’

‘I dared not leave her—Oh, what will you do?’

‘We must get her back as quietly and as quickly as we can—How strange it seems to be standing here near where we kneel! Speak to her, can you? she may listen then.’

Amy looked silently down on the still figure, and then kneeling by it, put her arm softly around its neck. He had never known till that moment that there could be such tenderness in her voice, though her whisper scarcely seemed to stir the darkness as she knelt.

‘Minna—dear Minna’ . .

As if she had scarcely heard or understood, Lady Farnim raised her face; her voice came hoarsely and brokenly through the gloom.

‘I cannot pray.’

There was a minute’s despairing silence whilst they stood still by her side.

‘Minna, dear Minna, it is so cold and dark. You have been in the church, do come home now with us. Say just one prayer, one little prayer, and come.’

‘You will kill yourself, Lady Farnim, if you will not come,’ said Frank.

She raised herself with a sudden start, and then fell back once more upon her knees. And then after an instant’s absolute silence, there came one long trembling moan through the darkness, and she raised her face as if with pride from her arms.

‘I have prayed,’ she said.

She tried to rise, and fell down helpless on the step. Frank knelt by her, wrapped her cloak closely round her, drew its hood over her head, and then took her up into his arms. For one instant she submitted, and then as he raised himself she gave a little struggle and began to moan again.

'Never mind, dear,' said Amy. 'If you will go home I will stay here a while and pray for you.'

Frank looked doubtfully back at her, but Minna gave a little sigh, and lay still as if relieved in his arms. 'Well, perhaps it will be best. Only stay till I return, and I will come back for you. I will leave you the lantern,' he said, and then he went. She heard his footsteps sounding further and further as he went slowly with his burden down the aisle; she heard the door open and shut, and she knew that she was again alone within the church. Darkness was round her, the gleam of the lantern was by her side, she knelt still with her head upon her arms.

. . . A long weary time, lonely, dark, and silent, passionate prayers, a pained dreaming feeling, numbed and hurt with cold, vague fancies that she was being surrounded by the unseen heads and figures from the roof, attempts at prayer that kept falling into unconsciousness again, a feverish longing for the endless waiting to be done, a long interval of unconsciousness, and then a dream that she was in a church, and that light was pouring in on her from the walls and from the roof. These

things were past at last, and she was looking up at him, and he was standing by her side.

‘Poor child, you look half asleep and frozen with cold,’ he said. And then she could not speak, she could only move her arms with a little sobbing sound to him, and he took her up and carried her to a seat, and wrapped round her head and feet the shawls that he had brought, and she lay quiet, and though the cold hurt still, there seemed a dreaming happiness to enclose her as she lay. But he went forward and knelt down in his turn, hiding his face in his hands upon the rails, whilst the lantern burnt dimly at his side. After a while he rose up and came and stood by her again.

‘You poor, poor child, let me take you home that you may be warm and at rest at last,’ he said. And then their eyes met for that one instant as he stood, and she tried to smile, though the tears began running down her face. Without another word he raised her up gently in his arms. As she hid her face, trembling, against his breast, some words seemed to force themselves between her lips, though they made there no whisper that could be heard—‘My love—my love.’

No more words—they went out together into the

night. Amy only felt that she was carried, it seemed to her as if she were a child, and were resting in her father's arms again. She kept her face hid against him, she felt that round them were the night and the stars. But he stood still at last after a long while, and as he put her gently down upon her feet she found that they were standing at the door.

'You will be able to rest now at length.'

'Yes.'

'We have been companions again?'

She gave no answer. It was too dark for them to see each other's faces; they stood within the door.

'I wish we could—could be companions always.'

The words came with a long sob, and she raised her head in surprise. There was no time for questions. He took her hands, crushing them as if he would almost break their bones, and turned away. She closed the door and crept upstairs in the darkness to her room.

A fire was burning there. She was too tired to think, and sank down in heavy fatigue upon a chair. After a while she remembered that she must not be found in this manner, and with pain and trouble

she took off her things, kneeling down then for words and tears of thanks. And then she slept—It seemed as if she had lived through a whole lifetime when she awoke at last, to find the morning sunlight on her bed. It was a gray day, intensely cold and still. She dressed with aching pain, and crept downstairs to Lady Farnim's room.

The January days passed heavily onwards, each day sinking in turn into a deeper gloom. The secret of that strange night of the new year remained still half-concealed, but it could be no secret now that Lady Farnim was ill.

The days passed onward, and Amy watched and waited, without companion now. It seemed that another household had been found by trouble too. Frank Mannian had left Landene, summoned hastily to return at once to his father's home. The difficulties there were indeed beyond his power to aid, but he had been called at length and must give what help he could.

## CHAPTER II

NEARLY five days had passed since that night in the darkness and the January sun was sinking slowly, as Frank walked alone up the village street. It seemed strange to him to be again so near his home.

Everything was still, gray and quiet, the white roofs even had no brightness against the grayness of the sky. The boys he knew, older now than when he had known them, were at school or work ; it was market-day, and the mothers had closed the doors of their houses and gone away to the town.



With slow steps and without the familiar greetings to which he was accustomed he went up the street. The place seemed changed, and he was conscious that there was a greater change within himself.

Four years—only four short years before, this place had meant his home and all his life to him, his hopes and interests, and almost all his memories were here. He remembered how he used to go up the street, whistling, with quick footsteps, light-hearted as a boy, almost as ignorant, and as free from care. He looked back on these things now as if they belonged to another life that he had lived. How often he had been rebuked for his light spirits then! Had he grown wiser now?

The thought came a little bitterly to him as he went with slow footsteps up the quietness of the street. He told himself, as in correction, that he had been a boy, and that he was now a man, that he must not expect to feel that easy continual cheerfulness again. Life, which pressed harder on him (he could feel that in the harder pressure of his lips) could never again mean that thoughtless round of cricket and of sports—he must pay for the greater amount of wisdom he had gained. And then, as the remembrance of that old buoyancy

and that easy forgetfulness returned once more upon his mind, he told himself that he had been better and wiser when he was a boy.

Certainly there was reason enough to account for his depression now. His uncle dead, his father ruined, and perhaps paralytic, his home stripped of many of the old possessions he had known, his own employment almost at an end, the sting and shame of poverty and debt within his heart—these things might be considered enough without seeking for more. There was more—the gloom of the great house at Landene, to which no husband came, the torture of fever and anxiety that only found relief in these outbreaks of madness that made a greater danger in themselves; these things could touch his heart as if they appealed in vain to him to save. And yet he told himself that he could bear the thought of even these, if only he could have kept his own old nature through them all.

One thing remained to hurt whenever he tried to put them all away—the thought of the companionship he had known, for which there was no longer any use in hoping now. The childish lips that were so patiently quiet whilst he reproved, the dark childish eyes, so full of sweet womanly ideas when

he was near, the little hands that he longed to take in his own—these then must all together be renounced, another must take them, and he must go away to Australia and give up all hope of them at all. It seemed to him that the thought of this must be a wound through all his life—his happy boy nature could never return to him again. That sympathy had been so close; he tried to leave off thinking of it, and went on walking through the white stillness of the street. Alas! it had not been his old nature that had desired it, it was the sense of deeper needs that made the want of help.

Doubtless there was also at the same time the remembrance of higher help within his heart. But he could not think of it, he felt soured and bitter, shrinking from all that lay before him, resentful against the father for whose sake he had come. A carter who passed by and touched his hat, looked in amazement at him as he raised his face. Frank could not have answered with a smile, and yet he wished he could.

Well—the village street was passed at last, and he had passed the door in the garden-wall, and was before the gabled vicarage again. He entered without ringing, but as he went down the dark

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narrow passage that did duty for a hall the old man-servant met him as he came.

‘Where is my father?’ asked Frank, abruptly, without any other greeting.

‘He is in the study, sir. Will you not go to him?’

‘I suppose I must.’

John stood still in the dark passage, rubbing his head, and pondering on the hard abruptness with which these words were said, and on the stern lines of the young face, whose boyhood he had known. He was not pleased, it seemed to him that now Mr Mannian was so ill, Master Frank ought not to be returning home in such a mood as this.

But as Frank went on through the dark passages it was not of his father that he thought. He was remembering how his heart used to beat faster sometimes when he went down them as a boy, and was wishing that the pain which must now be gone through could be as quickly past. He reached the door, entered without knocking, and stood still after he had closed it.

There was no movement to greet him. Mr Mannian was sitting before the table, with his head upon his hands. The room was dismantled,

the engravings had been taken down, and were resting against the walls upon the floor. There were gaps in the bookcases, and the books from them were in heaps upon the table—he had been making an inventory of them. He looked up for one instant only, his face was yellow, shrunk, trembling, his shoulders were more bent than before; with a humiliated motion he bent his face upon his hands. Frank stood still, looking; it seemed to him as if in that instant his heart stood still as well. Then, with a sudden movement, he went up to his father and laid a hand upon his shoulder.

‘Well, dad!’

It was the old name of endearment, used only on rare occasions, that he had kept through all his life. Something had rushed suddenly back upon him, the boyish tenderness that, years before, used to force him back after he was punished that he might cling with both arms round his father’s neck. It was the old impulse returned once more, and he obeyed it now. His hand rested still upon his father’s shoulder; Mr Mannian groaned to himself, but made no effort to be free.

‘I thought you were told that you were not to

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work,' said Frank. 'That's shocking bad, to disobey the doctor's rules like that. Come away, sit down in the armchair, and leave that list to me. I promise you that you shall not be let to do work now I am here.'

Mr Mannian made no answer; he was sobbing under his breath, and Frank, hearing that, gave no more words to him. Instead of them he removed quietly the pen, inkstand, and list, and sat down at once to write. After a while he got up and went to and from the bookcases, carrying books, writing, murmuring titles, or humming tunes softly to himself, as occasion served. Mr Mannian had raised his face, and sat leaning back in his chair, his shrunken figure trembling visibly, his face worn and aged, with its delicate lines altered now. Now and then, as Frank bent towards the table, he would rest an arm as if to support himself on his father's shoulder, but no words passed between them. Yet as Mr Mannian sat silent, he was conscious of nothing so much as of the young moving presence in the room.

Perhaps he was thinking of the long weary morning he had passed entirely alone in that bitter

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ceaseless solitude that pressed its weary weight on him. There seemed a difference now.

‘Hallo, this is a long job,’ said Frank with a little stretching movement of his arms. ‘I must really rest a bit. And you are not in your chair yet! Come, you must get there; you must always obey, you know.’

‘I feel very weak and ill,’ said Mr Mannian, in a low voice—they were the first words he had spoken. ‘I do not think I have the strength to move.’

‘Wait till my hands are on you,’ said Frank, ‘and then dare to speak to me like that!’

He did indeed contrive to support his father into the easy chair, and then stood with his hands behind his back, looking down on him. Mr Mannian did not look or speak; he was indeed very weak, and the inclination to tears became every moment more difficult to resist.

‘You want something to keep you up,’ said Frank. ‘I’ll bet you have been letting yourself down too long. Wine now?—but you don’t take that at this hour. Wait a minute, and you shall see what I shall do.’

He left the room, whilst his father lay back with closed eyes, and a struggle of conflicting sensations

in his heart, in which it may be that bitterness prevailed. But the door soon opened once more, and Frank returned, with a cup of hot bread-and-milk in his hand.

‘There now,’ he said, ‘I know what you like, though I can’t bear the stuff myself. Come now, eat and drink, and I will work again.’

‘It is all pity, pity’—murmured Mr Mannian to himself, as he tried with difficulty to eat. Yet, when he had done, he looked instinctively towards his son, who came at once and took the cup from him. Then he did not go back to his writing, he threw himself down on the ground by his father, resting both arms on his father’s knees, and looking up at him. The upturned face, with its dark curly hair, and the old light in its blue dark eyes, had something irresistibly boyish still in its appearance. Perhaps Mr Mannian thought so as he looked.

‘You keep young yet, Frank,’ he said, ‘how old are you?’

‘Nearly twenty-seven, worse luck to it,’ said Frank, with a sigh. ‘I am something more than full grown now.’



‘I am glad to see you so strong at any rate. You will need your health now to work for yourself.’

Frank was silent for a while, looking down upon the ground. He spoke then in a low voice, leaning still upon his father’s knees.

‘There are two of us.’

Again there was silence, and then Mr Mannian answered in low and melancholy tones.

‘You are mistaken—I have no right to demand so much from you. I am an old wreck, almost sunk, I have no wish even that you should consider yourself bound to me.’ He added a few more words with a greater effort, and in a lower voice. ‘For the last few years we have been separated, and by your choice you know.’

‘I know. I am sorry.’

Frank had let his arms drop slowly, as he spoke ; but he sat still upon the floor, looking down on it, and trying perhaps to gain more strength to speak. After a while the words came, though he did not raise his head.

‘I did not wish to go back to that old difference so soon,’ he said. ‘I do not see how that can help either of us. You have been ill ; you are older, and

may be in more need of me. And I have come back to you. That is all.'

After a while :

'I should like to work for you, to do all I can for you. There is no one else for me. No doubt we did dispute once, and I know you never forgive— Well, at any rate, you can say now that I have lost my other hopes, that I have come back to you like a dog, or a child that has been whipped, and that I am ready now to do everything you like.

'Is that enough? I will be more humble, if I can.'

'You speak bitterly, Frank,' said Mr Mannian. 'I am not used to that from you.'

'I do not mean it,' said Frank, taking the wasted hand that hung down near him, but still without raising his eyes. 'I wish you would—what shall I say?—accept me. I am your son, after all; indeed I care for you.'

There was a longer silence, whilst the light grew darker round them, until their faces were dim, near to each other as they were. Then the clergyman roused himself; he seemed to be making an effort, as if he were forcing words that he felt it was right for him to speak.

‘Before I can accept you, as you say,’ he said, ‘there are some questions I must ask.’

‘Oh, ask—ask anything you please,’ said Frank, letting his hand drop now, and jumping up. ‘But first I will shut in the shutters, it is too dark to see, and then we will have a confessional at once.’

He closed the room accordingly, and trimmed the fire, and lighted the lamp, performing these actions quickly and brightly, as he was used to do. But when they were done, and he had found a low chair for himself, and had sat down opposite his father on the rug, his face seemed to fall instinctively into its sterner and older lines once more. Mr Mannian looked across at him ; his worn delicate features, which were so changed with illness, absorbed into the expression of intense resolution to speak, as a face can be absorbed by pain. His voice came in low tones, and with even more than its old sternness when he spoke.

‘Frank, there is one question—there is one thing I have never been able to understand till now. When you insisted on staying at Landene two or three years ago, was it on account of Lady Farnim that you stayed?’ The fire and smoke made

flickering lights and shadows between them, and there was silence.

‘Others have said so—there are many who have spoken or written to me of you.’

‘Do you know,’ said Frank, suddenly, ‘that Lord Farnim intends to give me my dismissal in some way or other when he comes back this spring?’

‘I did not know. Who told you so?’

‘Oh—Mr Bortop intimated it plainly enough only a day or two ago. I suppose your friends have been corresponding with his lordship too?’

Again silence whilst the firelight flickered in the room.

‘If I had thought, Frank,’ said Mr Mannian very slowly, ‘if I had for a moment supposed that there was the least truth in things they intimated, I should not have left his lordship to be informed by them. As it was there was one reply, and one only, that I made always to them all.’

Frank looked towards him in silence.

‘I knew you—I can trust you.’

So much confidence he had possessed then in the wilful son from whom he had parted in so much displeasure, with whom he had never been on confiding terms at all. The slow words fell on the

ears of the younger man as a surprise. But he felt that it was his turn now to speak, and that the moment could no longer be delayed. He spoke in the low resolute tones that on his side also meant determination now.

‘I will tell you everything I can,’ he said, ‘and then you may blame me if you will.’

And so slowly, he told the story, whilst save for his voice there was silence in the room and the fire-light shone upon them both. He told of the trick that had caused his first arrival at Landene, and of Minna, and her beauty, and how she had proposed to him to stay. Then he told of the floating suspicions that had gathered by degrees within his heart, and how he had spoken to her; and he told also, though in more reserved and guarded words, how she had answered by an appeal to him. Something he said, too, of her loveliness, her growing illness, her waiting anxiety for the husband who did not return. And to these things he added, too, all the words that Mr Bortop had said to him about her life. ‘She has done harm and wrong enough, no doubt,’ he said, ‘but yet she is innocent of the worst—and she has suffered more than I can tell you—she is suffering now—I believe she is selfish

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and bad, but I must try to help her, even you would try to help her if you knew.'

When he had done speaking, there was silence.

'Frank,' said Mr Mannian then.

Frank looked up at him.

'Is that all you have to say?'

There was silence.

'I have heard you—I understand and believe you. Have you anything more to tell?'

Again silence.

'There is one thing,' said Frank, in a low voice, 'but it is very hard to say.'

'I am waiting for it.'

After a while—'I don't know why I should find it so difficult, and yet I do; I suppose it is better to say the whole at once. Father, I have told you one reason why I wished to stay at Landene; that is not all. There is someone else there—someone I love.'

A long pause.

'She is like a child, and yet she is a woman,' said Frank, in a low voice. 'She is so pure-hearted, so earnest to do what she thinks is right, I know no one like her. She is very fair and

pretty. She lives with Lady Farnim. I do not know what else to say.'

'Is she—is this lady poor?' asked Mr Mannian, in a low voice, at last.

'Yes; very poor.'

'And you are poor, too, Frank.'

'Yes.'

'Then you have no choice. You must be separated.'

Frank was silent, looking down upon the ground.

'If she is pretty, as you say,' said Mr Mannian, 'and a favourite of Lady Farnim, I think, at any rate, you need not have much anxiety for her. She will no doubt be able to find a husband for herself.'

'Yes, no doubt,' said Frank, and covering his face with his hands, he burst into tears.

Those tears served perhaps as the outlet of all the many emotions he had endured that day; or rather, perhaps, if it had not been for those emotions he would have had more courage to endure. He was able to control himself almost immediately, and to raise his face again. His father was looking at him with an intent and melancholy glance.

'I am afraid this goes rather deep with you, Frank,' he said.

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'I am afraid it does.'

'I suppose you had this feeling when we spoke together before. Why did you say nothing at all of it to me?'

Frank hung his head a little, and looked down upon the ground. 'I do not think you can blame me much for that,' he said.

'I do blame you,' said his father, in stern, insistent tones, 'and I have a right to blame you. We were speaking together on a subject that concerned your life, the least you could do was to be perfectly candid with me. You kept your principal motive entirely concealed, and you told me nothing of Lady Farnim's appeal to you, or of the reasons you had for desiring to assist her. The result is that through all these years of trouble there has been a division between us that a few words only on your part might have spared. You might have been open with me.'

His voice ceased, but its low, stern tones seemed to be vibrating still in the room. They kept up a curious echo in his own heart as well; as he leant back and shaded his eyes from the firelight with his hand they kept on repeating themselves within



his mind—and with them, too, came another voice that shaped itself into a question, as it came.

‘Did I ever teach him to be open with me?’

Thoughts that had never touched his mind before began to rise as vividly as pictures in his heart—his lonely room, the lonely house, the eager curly-haired boy, whose caresses he had so persistently repulsed. How often when his own load of solitude was pressing most heavily on his heart had he been irritated at the most distant sound of mirth; how often had he told his little son that he must not laugh, must not play, till even in obedience to him all signs of merriment were checked at once when he was near. How far from him he had always kept his boy, and yet how ready he had been always to punish each offence with voice and hand, because he was so sure of the young sweet temper that would never answer to punishment with sullenness. The lonely years during which he had bent alone under his load of depression were pressing again upon his heart, but he thought also of the brighter life that he had condemned to solitude as well—his heart, which had ached only for himself, began to ache a little for his son.

He looked towards Frank, almost as if half-fearing some reproach. But Frank, leaning with an arm over the back of his chair, was lost in meditation, and as their glances met there was no accusation in his eyes, rather the look of boyish shamefacedness that his twenty-six years were still able to retain.

‘I know I was wrong. But it was hard for me,’ he said.

‘Then we will say no more about it,’ Mr Mannian replied. ‘I feel stronger now, and you shall come with me, if you will, to your uncle’s room.’

It was hard work going even at that hour, and with a candle, through the house. For here and there even in the passages a picture had been taken down from the walls, or a piece of carved furniture removed: Mr Mannian had owned various valuable possessions, and he had parted with everything he could. Before the short distance was over, Frank had begun to look round him with shrinking eyes, the furtive trembling glance of one who expects a loss. But the distance was not far, and they soon reached what had been the chamber of the dead.

Still, luxurious, comfortable, there was no dismaying here. The pictures hung on the walls

the valuable clock ticked on the mantelpiece, the bed had its rich heavy curtains, the easy-chairs were softly cushioned by the fire-place. And, yet, the whole room had in it a strange heavy feeling of emptiness and gloom ; in some deeper sense there had been here dismantling too.

‘I wrote to tell you of his death,’ said Mr Mannian in a low voice, as he stood by his son’s side, holding the candle in his hand.

‘You did.’ Frank spoke also almost in a whisper, no other tone could rise in such a place. ‘But you did not tell me much about his end’

‘There was not much to tell. He went very rapidly at last. He seemed quieter, gentler than I have ever known him, and though he could scarcely speak, he sent for me often to read or pray by him.’

‘That was very kind of him,’ said Frank, with a bitterness that could not be restrained. ‘But I think he might have remembered also to give you some payment for your prayers.’

‘I wished for nothing from him,’ said Mr Mannian quietly ; and they went out and down the passages again.

‘You know then?’ asked the father, after they had gone side by side in silence for a while.

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'Mr Bortop told me some while ago. He gave me various particulars last night. It is queer to think that an old memory could have had so much influence with *him*. Well—Lady Farnim will be a richer woman, if her husband does not lay hands upon the gold. Poor soul, I doubt if that will give her the satisfaction she requires.'

'They met once, I think. He seemed once to intimate as much.'

'Two—three years ago, in the summer-time, as I have heard. That must have been a meeting, I should like to have been there. No doubt my Lady brought out all her airs and charms for him.'

They had reached the door of the study, but Mr Mannian paused before it, as if there were still some words that must be said.

'There is one thing I must tell you, Frank, though I am afraid it will hardly make your disappointment less. Your uncle died a much richer man than we imagined, or than even he knew till just towards the end. Some old lawsuit had just been settled—he left a capital of something over fifty thousand when he died.'

'Whew-w,' whistled Frank, with a little contraction of his lips. 'It seems a pity he couldn't take

it with him, or leave some crumbs for us. But there—I have no doubt his dying bed was soothed by the remembrance that we should at any rate be poor.’

‘We will not speak evil of the dead,’ said Mr Mannian, and laid his hand on the handle of the door, and then stopped short again. ‘Frank—there is one thing more—it may perhaps be best for me to speak. If Lady Farnim offers you any of this—will you accept it from her hands?’

Frank paused in his turn, whilst his dark forehead was reddened by a flush. ‘I had thought of that, though I do not think it is likely that she will—No, I will not.’

‘That is right.’

They went in together, and then Frank turned round once more. ‘There is a queer remembrance that comes to me,’ he said, ‘that evening before I went to Landene, when he could have had no idea where I was going. He said a great deal, more than I could understand at the time, and impressed hard upon me that I must make no expectations out of him. I suppose he meant to be honest in his own way, poor old chap. It is no good speaking of him; we will begin to work again.’

They did begin again upon the list, and Frank set to work in the highest spirits as of old, his old saucy audacity being even more ready than before. It seemed as if with the necessity for labour, his careless boyish spirits had returned.

His father had a different view of him, however, later that evening, when their work was done for the time and they were resting together in the study. They were sitting close together with an angle of the table between them, Frank's face was resting on his hands. His voice came quietly, but it was not more quiet than his face.

'I suppose we are both shipwrecked,' he said. 'I have made up my mind to that.'

There was silence, whilst Mr Mannian looked earnestly at him.

'Frank,' he said at last, breaking the pause with an effort, 'I am afraid I understand you, and if I do you are in more danger than you know. Don't let yourself get hopeless whilst you are young. I have suffered from that all my life. Even if we do wrong'—

He broke off here, and added after a while—

'You were speaking of Lady Farnim. I am

afraid I know too much of that—that feeling. It is a bad sort of prison-house.

‘When you feel most lonely, tell yourself one thing—I married the darling of my heart, and was miserable—so miserable that I was relieved that death should spare her the load of my burden so soon.’ He went on, after a while, and in a lower voice, ‘And yet I have missed her day after day, and night after night, since she went. The touch of a woman’s hand—nothing can give that back again when it is lost.’

They were sitting close together, and with a sudden movement Frank took his father’s face for an instant between his two strong hands, and laughed. Then he got up, and with energy and cheerfulness began to write again. ‘The boy has his mother’s disposition,’ murmured Mr Mannian to himself.

Perhaps, even in spite of that murmur, and in spite of that long evening together, he was not too much inclined to believe in this resolute and variable son. During the next few days he observed him constantly, ready perhaps to be disappointed, with an attention he had not given to him before. But Frank’s cheerfulness and watchful

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tenderness were unceasing—he did not disappoint any expectations that had been formed.

And, yet, even to his nature, the next few days must have been hard enough to bear. The hopelessness of their prospects—for he was himself almost without employment, and his father had determined on resigning his living—the constant care and attention that an invalid requires, the absence from their home of many things, to which his childhood had been used—all these things accumulated together must have made a strain of trial. Once only he gave way, that was on the day after his arrival, when he had gone with his father into a lumber-room, where an old Cremona violin had always been accustomed to have a corner to itself. The corner was vacant now.

‘Oh, the old fiddle!’ Frank exclaimed, and then his lips trembled, so that he could not speak again.

‘My dear Frank,’ said his father gently, ‘we are not girls, but men.’

Mr Mannian never gave way, the nervous strength of his disposition asserted itself above the morbid despondency that had almost overwhelmed him at first. Wasted as he was, recovering from the effects of a stroke of paralysis, and bent beneath



the load of debt, that to his sensitive nature meant disgrace as well, he yet never complained, and gave untiring attention to all arrangements that were made. A friend had promised Frank a temporary clerkship in his bank in London, and on this slender means, it appeared, that both father and son must subsist until something more permanent could be found. The relation, who was a farmer in Australia, was ready to offer a home and work to the young man at any time, but he could not very well leave his father yet.

Meanwhile he worked hard, and gave his father all the assistance and all the tender care he could. It must have seemed strange to Mr Mannian, who had lived so much alone through all his life, to find himself the object of such attention now. He said nothing, accepted everything, and seemed only quietly resigned. Yet even from him there came one word at last.

‘We must do the best we can, of course,’ said Frank. ‘If we can’t rejoice—I think you never have rejoiced since I have known you—at any rate we will be as cheerful as we can.’

Mr Mannian had risen to leave the room. He

stopped suddenly, and bending over his son laid a hand upon his shoulder as he looked at him.

‘It’s a poor heart, Frank,’ he said, ‘that can find *no* reason to rejoice.’

Frank had one delicious moment then—one of those too rarely earned moments when we feel the consciousness that our reward has been deserved. But he answered with his usual lightness.

‘At any rate, I can plague you enough. A real good son would not keep you half as much alive.’

Doubtless these constant small occupations and assumed burden of unselfishness were of very considerable benefit to him, for in spite of all outward pretences he could not feel easily resigned. A continual feverish rebellion against the life to which he felt himself condemned, a shrinking from the very thought of the love he might have won—these things were not easy to bear, nor rendered more easy by the necessity of keeping them continually concealed. Little by little he chafed and struggled into submission, resolved inwardly never to marry, and prepared himself not to expect too much brightness or happiness in life. In this manner, after his own fashion, he took up his cross. When alone with his father it was easy to be

cheerful; to all other people the expression of his face, which had been very young before, seemed to grow older and sterner every day.

It was on one of the last days of January that he received a letter from Mr Bortop, entreating him to return to Landene for a while. Lord Farnim would not come near the place, Lady Farnim was seriously ill, Mr Bortop seemed in great perplexity himself. In these difficulties he turned, as it seemed, to his young assistant as the only adviser he could find.

Under other circumstances Frank would not have been very ready to bestow much assistance or companionship on him. But in the midst of his own troubles he had been possessed with haunting fears for Lady Farnim, which had grown stronger in silence every day—and, moreover, in spite of resolves of self-restraint, there was luxurious happiness in the thought of being near Amy for a while. Mr Mannian was stronger in health, and made no attempt to oppose his departure, though his tacit consent seemed rather too silent to be satisfied.

It was a gloomy morning, with great storm clouds of snow sweeping slowly up the sky, when Frank again left his home. That morning the pictures

remaining in the house had been packed for a picture-dealer, and the walls were bare. One of his last actions, therefore, was to collect together the very inartistic water-colours he had accomplished in his youth, and to place them with a great show of triumph in his father's hands.

'Look *here*,' he said. 'No one shall ever say we are without our works of art.'

He said this laughing, and turned round laughing to wave his hand as soon as he was outside the house. But as he walked down the village street, and watched the slow storm-clouds rising before him in the sky, he felt far removed from any inclination to be gay. The day was chill and dark; it seemed to him as if he were leaving trouble behind him only to reach some greater, more undefined trouble that rested still beyond.

### CHAPTER III

It was so indeed. The skies had been gray over the village and the rectory, but those who watched day after day at Landene had felt themselves in the midst of a gloom like that of an evening which is quickly darkening towards night. And yet no one dared to speak aloud of any cause for fear.

One mind at any rate appeared as yet to be at rest. Minna had not recovered from the effect of that second adventure in the night-time ; it had left her ill and wasted, with a dry short cough and with a feverish glow upon her cheeks. And

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yet she had scarcely seemed so quiet or so satisfied before, so easily managed, or so gently and even gratefully content. After the first few days she insisted always on rising ; but excepting for that, she was very patient with regard to all directions that were given, and allowed herself to be dressed or fed as her watchers and companions pleased. She gave no further sign of any fresh outbreak—indeed, she seemed as if she would have been almost too feeble to attempt one—but spent day after day resting upon cushions, doing nothing or very little, with a dreaming light as of satisfied thought within her eyes. To those who were round her there was something almost alarming in this strange silent condition, that appeared to keep its content within itself.

There was indeed one to whom she had not been entirely silent, but the state of mind she revealed was not one that could entirely check alarm. Amy was sitting alone with her in her dressing-room one evening, resting against her knees as she sat on a cushion at her feet—ill, worn, and feverish herself, and, therefore, very ready to be quiet. Five days only had passed after that secret adventure in the night-time, and neither had recovered from its

effects. Minna had risen from her bed for the first time that morning, the white-quilted robe she wore hung loosely on her, she leant against her cushions and was still. All through the long day she had scarcely moved or spoken; but now Amy, as she leant against her, could feel that her hair was being softly stroked by her companion's fingers.

'Darling,' the voice from above whispered softly, 'I feel as if I might be happy now.'

Some sudden instinct, she did not quite know what it was, made Amy instead of looking up, turn round and hide her face in her companion's lap. Afterwards when she thought of that time she seemed to feel again the soft down against her cheek. Her instinct had guided her truly, Minna continued speaking in a low voice, but without restraint.

'I am afraid I may have been bad and wrong,' she said. 'I do not know that I ought to have gone out—that night—with you. But I could not help it. I did pray to God, and I asked him to give me my husband soon, and now I have only to get well.'

Amy raised her face, and putting her arms round Lady Farnim's neck kissed her softly, and no

more words were said. But afterwards, alone in her own room that night, she thought long and earnestly about the scene, scarcely knowing why it should make so much unhappiness in her heart. Prayers *were* answered, she knew it, was sure of it, it must be because she was so ill herself that she found such difficulty in believing now. And then she thought again of Lady Farnim, and it seemed to strike her all at once that she was ill, weak, without any relations or friends near her, and that once more it rested with herself alone to give all the help she could.

Once more the feeling of responsibility seemed to overcome the sense of fear; to her timid, childish nature the fear of doing wrong remained the greatest dread. She must do the best she could.

Her first action was to see the doctor, though her nervous lips found great difficulty in framing the command that after he had seen his patient he should wait in the drawing-room for her. The old butler stood impassive, and did not seem astonished in the least. She received the doctor in the great drawing-room, where the mirrors reflected them from every side, trembling, burnt with blushes, not able to remember what questions she should ask. But his



first words, with the shock they brought, were able to restore her self-command.

No doubt he was glad to have an opportunity of saying them, for he spoke openly and with great gravity at once. He considered Lady Farnim very seriously ill, it would be well to communicate with her relations or her friends. Then, pausing suddenly, and with a curious glance at the childish figure, which seemed to be the only responsible agent in the house—

‘Lady Farnim has near relations, I suppose?’

‘She has a father—somewhere,’ faltered Amy, overwhelmed with confusion as she spoke, at the too evident significance of the word she had employed. ‘And then there is her husband.’

‘Yes; but I believe Lord Farnim is also—abroad,’ altering suddenly the word he had been almost tempted to repeat. ‘It will be well to write to him. Is there anyone else?’

‘No one.’

He looked at her with more intentness than before, and added with some gentleness of tone ‘It is a heavy responsibility for you, my child.’

‘Oh, tell me, is she really very ill?’ cried Amy, and the tears started suddenly to her eyes. He

looked sorrowfully at her, bowed, and left the room. She went up to her own bedroom, and began to think again.

During the first few days after that terrible journey in the night-time, she had liked often to retire to her apartment that she might weep luxurious tears as she lived through the pain of it once more. A more terrible dread was on her now, but though she was still ill and fatigued she felt no desire for tears.

After long consideration she determined to send for Mr Bortop, and to confide in him. She could not decide in what terms to write, and as she watched by Minna whilst the afternoon light grew dim, she kept on composing the letter in her mind. Mr Bortop, however, saved her the trouble by arriving that evening and desiring to see her himself.

Doubtless, other people besides herself were beginning to be alarmed, for it was strange how ready everyone seemed to be to confide in her. The burly Mr Bortop was much agitated and perplexed, and conveyed his tidings with much huskiness of voice. He had heard that morning that Lord Farnim had arrived in London a few

days before. He waited here, but Amy remained silent and troubled, looking down upon the ground.

Then came the rest. Mr Bortop seemed sincerely perplexed; foreseeing, perhaps, various troubles for himself. Lord Farnim had finally determined to return, and to reside at Landene as before. He was willing to allow to Lady Farnim as much time as she required for leaving the place in which she had lived now for nearly four years. Also, he desired to settle entirely upon herself this money that had recently been left to her, on which, being her husband, he might have had a claim. With regard to all else his determination remained unaltered still; he was prepared to make any arrangement Lady Farnim desired for her convenience, but he would not see her or speak to her, or listen to any representations on this subject that might be made.

‘Oh, surely,’ faltered Amy, ‘he cannot know how ill she is.’

Mr Bortop rubbed his head, and was silent.

‘Write to him, tell him she is ill, tell him he ought to come and see her, he ought’—and she almost broke down entirely into tears. It was

hard to gain anything from Mr Bortop, but she forced from him some reluctant promises at last.

The next day he came to tell her that he had written the letter, and after that she waited patiently for more. It was hard work nursing Minna through the long white days, with the thought of the husband who was so near within her heart—the sound of carriage-wheels made her heart beat faster, and sudden footsteps sent the blood rushing to her cheeks. Those long winter afternoons!—they passed one after another in slow stillness, and Lord Farnim did not return.

There came instead a change that brought deeper trouble in its train. Minna became restless and irritable, talked often to herself, and seemed under the strain of some agitation that her companions could not understand. It became evident at last that she had some idea that her husband was in England, and was possessed with an intense longing to go to him. Perhaps some careless words had been dropped in her presence, for the servants talked openly about Lord Farnim now; or perhaps this was only a fresh turn of the malady that had taken hold of her. She became very feverish, it was necessary to pacify her with some preparations

of packing, and to watch continually over her by day and night. Once she ordered the carriage to come to the door in the midst of the night, but by the time it was ready Amy had persuaded her to wait till morning. Over and over again she told her watchers that they were keeping her, they did not wish her to see her husband, she would see that they should be punished when he came. Those were terrible times, but they did not last long, her excitement brought on perpetual outbreaks of coughing, and at last, on one morning when she had again ordered the carriage, she was found on the floor of her room, dressed for travelling, with her mouth covered with the blood that had risen from her lungs. She was too weak to resist them, and they carried her to her bed.

The darkness was gathering quickly around the watchers now, but they did not dare to tell each other what they thought.

At least, the last change brought one relief for which they had not hoped. From that morning on which she had been carried to her bed, Minna's restlessness disappeared, and she became quiet once more. Perhaps the rest pleased her, for the first time she began to acknowledge that she was ill.

She would lie upon her pillows, with her large eyes looking at them with a dreaming light, following quietly those who moved about the room. Now and then, when she was alone with Amy, she would whisper softly that she was not sorry to be ill, when her husband knew how ill she was he would come to see her then.

It seemed as if that trust was continually with her; and as if, even in her weakness, she could not utterly give way whilst it supported her. And, in spite of a darkness of dread, Amy, seeing that hope so constant, could not help hoping too. Only now and then she could not but ask herself whether even Lord Farnim's return would save his wife.

The long white January days passed slowly onwards. Minna lay in bed, slept a great deal, and played draughts now and then. Sometimes she was restless; and sometimes, when waking from her sleep, she would ask when her husband was coming; and night and day Amy watched always by her side.

It was towards the end of January that the doctor proposed to write to Lord Farnim himself, and to inform him of the illness of his wife. Amy received the letter when it was written, and gave it

into Mr Bortop's hands. The days passed on, and there came no answer. The slow terror, growing always in her heart, became unbearable at last, and she wrote to him herself. But there came no answer still.

And then came the gray January day on which Frank returned. It happened that Minna had risen that day, and was lying on the sofa in her dressing room, where she received him. She seemed pleased to see him, and smiled at him, said a few words, and became for some minutes like herself. After he was gone she became much excited, and desired that a lawyer should be sent for from the nearest town at once. Amy left them together in the dressing-room. Minna did not seem ill that evening, she was pleased and triumphant, with a light of some secret pleasure in her eyes. Something she whispered about women, she would like a woman to have power for once, she said; and then, in a lower murmur, whilst a sad look crossed the face that rested upon the pillow, she added a word or two more, as if to herself—'Leap Year—St Valentine's.' Her eyelashes hid her eyes, but Amy could see that they were wet with tears. That

night she became much worse, and in the early morning the doctor was summoned again.

The white winter days went onwards, and the watchers waited still. Amy slept now in a little bed by the invalid, and scarcely left her side by day or night. She could not think or feel, she could only give any help she could, and watch the increasing weakness with a sinking of the heart that seemed to leave her too miserable for tears. It did not make the time less hard that Minna would scarcely allow that she was ill, that she would not send for the clergyman, that she listened impatiently to the Bible, and that she seemed, even in her feebleness, to resent the smallest remark that she heard upon her state. Her whole mind was absorbed with the one thought that occupied it, it appeared as if it were impossible to her to get free from it now, the sad longing eyes that looked from her wasted face never altered their expression for an instant. And then one night in a violent fit of coughing she broke another blood vessel, and after that it became difficult to her to speak.

The next morning she made signs for pen and paper, and whilst Amy steadied as well as she could her shaking hand, she traced a few words with the



fingers that had written another message four years before.

‘I am very ill. Come to me.—MINNA.’

The day passed, and the night, the morning came again. All through the long hours of that long day Amy waited by her side, but Lord Farnim did not return. Minna lay very still, but now and then silent tears rolled down her cheeks. That night she was restless and delirious, and by the morning it was evident that almost all hope was gone.

That was on the last day but one of January. The winter days passed on one after another sinking one after another into night.

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On the evening of the first day of February there rose a violent storm of wind and snow. Frank’s small window-panes were rattling when he went to his room, and looking out before he drew the curtain he could see and hear the tempest amongst the trees in the park. He was scarcely in bed when he could hear other sounds below as well, footsteps and voices and the noise of opening doors. And then Mr Bortop came upstairs to him. Lady Farnim was very ill, much worse, and Miss Merse wished him to go over to the house at once.

The park looked strange in the darkness, with the tempest of snow driving always in his face. He felt awed into stillness, and could ask no questions of the messenger; he could only try to pray, and think of that night when he had carried Lady Farnim in his arms. The wind and storm were against them; it was only after a long while that he and the boy, who summoned him, could make their way to the house.

Within were scattered lights and servants standing about in different directions in the hall or on the stairs. No one was weeping or seemed grieved, but there was an awestruck silence over them all. The white-haired Crothan, who appeared the most moved, came and whispered a few words to Frank with trembling lips. Lady Farnim had been taken worse that morning. They had telegraphed for Lord Farnim, but he had sent no answer back. She had been sinking gradually all through the day, never able once to speak, the doctor said she could not last many more hours now. They had sent for the clergyman, but he was ill, and Miss Amy, she thought that perhaps Mr Mannian would come. . . . And then the thin

stately Norris approached silently, and took Frank upstairs at once.

They left behind them the scattered lights and the servants ; the upstairs passages were dark and silent as the grave. Frank felt his heart beating faster and faster, as he walked. The little boudoir was dark, the dressing-room was dark, but through the half-opened door they could see the lights in the bedroom beyond. Before that door they paused for an instant, everything was still, and then they entered.

It was a sight never to be forgotten, a sight to brand itself upon a mind and heart through all a life, and yet all was quiet. The great gray bedroom was lighted with candles, the dark pictures of ladies looked down from the walls. Amy was sitting by the bed, her hair rough and disordered, a look of speechless distress upon her face. She scarcely looked at him as he entered ; her face was turned always towards the bed, and she did not rise or move. Minna lay still, her face drawn and wasted, framed by its dark hair against the pillow, and in her eyes a helpless terror, like that of some dumb animal that has been driven to bay at last.

Doubtless she had for the first time become

entirely conscious of her state. There was no longing or craving in her eyes now, no anger or sorrow, only that helpless agony of dread—the dread of a soul that finds itself, unprepared and suddenly, face to face with death. She was too weak to speak, too weak to move, she could only lie still in her loneliness and feel life ebbing slowly away towards the darkness beyond.

It was an awful expression to see, that look in her eyes; from the first instant Frank could see nothing else but that. He stood still, his knees knocking against each other; and then, gathering his courage, he advanced and sat down by the bed. If he could give nothing else, surely at least the human pity that he had might help.

‘Do you know me, Lady Farnim?’ he whispered, bending over her. She could not move, but it seemed to him that she understood what he said. Even at that instant there came across his mind a doubt whether it was well for him to be there, but he felt to the depth of his soul the utmost need that he had been called upon to assist, he had promised to try to help her, and he could not leave her now.

‘I have come to see you, to be with you,’ he

whispered, his voice sounding, even to his surprise, as gentle as a woman's as he spoke. 'You will not be frightened now? Take my hand, that may make you think of help.'

'And think,' whispered Amy from the other side, 'that higher Help, too, is near.'

She seemed to hear, to feel, there came a change in the expression of her face. He had taken her hand and grasped it in both his own, the feeling of that strong clasp seemed to give rest to her. He looked down into her face, there came over him a strange sensation, as if they were both standing by the dark river, and as if his strength must ebb with hers. He kept fast hold of her hand and let the moments pass.

The minutes passed slowly, they could hear the ticking of the clock. Now and then Amy whispered a few words, a text, a few lines of a hymn, a word or two of prayer, it seemed as if she heard them and was pleased. She lay still, with Amy bending over the bed that one hand might touch her shoulder softly, and with Frank grasping always her hand between his own. The minutes passed slowly, she lay with their care round her, until slowly and gradually she began to sink into the

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unconsciousness that neither hand nor voice can reach.

She lay very still, her eyes half closed, her breathing coming quietly, and her lips also quiet as if she were resting now. The wax candles were half-burnt-out, but they still lighted the room—the hand that Frank still held rested quietly in his own. He laid it down, and sat for a minute looking on her face ; then he rose, met Amy's eyes for one instant, and gently left the room.

Norris was waiting in the dressing-room ; he could just see her in the darkness, and signed to her to go into the bedroom and join the watcher there. He passed into the dark boudoir, and sat down upon the ottoman, knowing that his duty was done, and yet unable to go, unable to get free from the feeling that he might be wanted and that he must be near. He knelt down and prayed, he got up and felt his way to the ottoman again. It seemed as if he were in a dream, odd scraps of rhyme kept repeating themselves in his head, and yet through all he could see through the darkness and the half-opened doors the distant lights that were in Lady Farnim's room.

Sometimes he got up and stole his way through

the darkness towards her door. Everything was still, he could just see the light, and the gray curtain, and Amy's figure as she bent over the bed. He could hear the ticking of the clock through the stillness. And then he would find his way back through the darkness to the ottoman again.

The night passed slowly on. As the hours advanced towards morning it seemed to him as if the darkness and the coldness round him were like the loneliness and chillness of the grave. He could not bear it at last, and went into the dressing-room that he might be nearer the others at least. He could only see the light through the door from where he sat—There was an intense stillness, the clock ticked, he sat still, imagining that he could hear dying breathing through the silence. The time went on slowly, there was no noise, it seemed to him as if there would never be a change. And then all at once he heard a sound within.

It was real, they were moving, it appeared as if they rose. He must have been almost sleeping, for he could see now through the blinds the paleness of the morning light. Without making any sound he

rose to his feet. All was still, and then there was a rustling noise again. He looked in; the two watchers had fallen on their knees beside the bed. His heart began beating horribly, and he shrank back once more.

Then, the door opened, and Amy came out of the room. Her face was very pale, her breath panting into sobs, and she put out her hands before her as if to feel her way. Without saying anything—neither of them could have spoken, he took one of her hands and led her from the room. They went together down the stairs to the little sitting-room, where the guests had been assembled on that November night. It was very dark, he threw open the shutters, and let in the paleness of the morning. She stood still trembling in the midst of the room. And then he came and stood by her side. Her hair was disordered, her face very pale, but her voice was quiet, and hardly trembled as she spoke.

‘She was never conscious again—we scarcely knew—when she died’—

And then, with a sudden cry in which the pent-up anguish of the last few months found relief at last, ‘Oh, she has been miserable, so miserable. Oh, God help us,’ and with an outburst of sobs she



fell down upon her knees. He stood still by her distressed, and not able to move. But as soon as that shivering trembling agony was over she rose to her feet, though she was scarcely able to stand.

‘I might have helped her more.’

Frank was silent for a minute or two, and then he took her hand.

‘Dear, you are very tired,’ he said. ‘Go and rest now, or you will be ill.’

For that instant he held her hand and looked into her eyes. Then he let it drop with a long sigh, and turned away. It seemed to him in that moment as if he were renouncing the only human love that might have been for him. Blinded with snow, and with that death-bed scene always before his eyes, he found his way back across the park.

The morning rose fair and bright after the tempests were over. But the blinds were drawn closely at Landene, and all the house was still. An early message had been sent to London to inform Lord Farnim of the death of his wife. It received an immediate answer, and that afternoon he returned to his home.

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## CHAPTER IV

LORD FARNIM stood alone in his wife's room.

The blinds were drawn closely, but the wax candles gave a dim light. Everything was still, the family portraits watched with quiet eyes, the luxurious furniture was in its order as usual, the gray curtains fell in heavy richness round the bed. And there, on the bed, was the silent form, he was alone in the room with the dead.

Her face rested against the pillow ; he had drawn the covering away, and stood looking down on it, not daring to move, as if he might yet wake it from

that quietness as from sleep. Yellow, wasted, the dark eyelashes drooping, the lips quiet, it rested in silence there. He stood still, holding his breath ; as if she might yet rise from that silence, and the dark eyes might open to him again.

Doubtless he had been wise to desire this sight so soon, to wish to meet it as soon as possible after he had entered his home. In the dim stormy light of the afternoon his feet had mounted once more those steps up which he had gone with his bride four years before, and he had entered his home again. The rooms were dark, but the familiar objects and faces were round him—it was like some strange dream ; with the one thought always in his mind he had eaten and drunk in his old room as his servants wished : and then, that short interval over, he had insisted on facing this alone at once.

He stood now by the bed, a young man still, with eyes more hard and steady than they had been, and fair hair cut close on a harsh forehead as of old. The few wax lights burnt near him, he was dressed in black, there was the stillness of a funeral chamber in the room. He never took his eyes for one instant off the bed, on that sight which his own hands had uncovered they rested still.

Oh, it was not so strange, so hard to bear as he had thought, he could look quietly now. *She* lay there, quite still, those eyes and lips that had been so full of scorn for him would not uncloseto vex him with their contempt again. They could not—that was strange....

She was altered, thinner, not so lovely as she had been. It seemed to him if this still form had not after all very much to do with her; as if he might turn his head and find her standing behind him insulting him with her beauty; taunting him with the love he once had felt for her. He did turn his head, half-fearfully too. No—no, he looked back upon the silent face again.

It *was* lovely still, in spite of all, that oval wasted face that had been more lovely once. Something there was that stirred within him as he looked at it, not hatred, nor contempt, nor pity, nor the passionate love he once had felt, and yet something that seemed to be all of these combined. It touched him like shivering pain, that strange thrill, he felt as if he could not bear it, and yet he could not go away and leave her yet. How familiar to him was this room in which she lay—his mother's room, his own once, for he

had wished to make his mother's room his own. She occupied it now. The old family portraits that he had known so long were looking down upon her from the walls, and there came over him a sensation as if he hated the thought that she also had some claim to be there, a dread of himself, as if his hatred which had been so relentless to the living, might in some sudden outburst now lay profaning hands upon the dead.

No, it was not for that he had come here, and it was not with such feeling that he must leave. He must try to be collected and to be calm. A strange calmness seemed indeed to overcome him as he stood. He looked down upon the silent face—the thought of the restless, surging, ceaseless misery of the last few years was in his mind; and then a question rose like a whisper in his heart, ‘Had he indeed gained at last that for which he wished?’

‘Go,’ said the inward voice, ‘there is no need for you to stay here any longer now. She is dead at last, and you are free. Go now—marry—have children—be happy.’ The words sounded like a bitter mocking echo in his mind. He looked still down on her—the beauty he had loved, the bride

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he had hated, the woman whom his cruelty had killed.

Oh, he could not deny it or hide it from himself, it was *true*, he knew it by the tumult of mind in which those years had passed, by that iron intensity of feeling growing into hardness round his heart as message after message arrived, entreating him to come. He had heard more since he had arrived at home, though he had heard but little yet; he knew vaguely of sick frenzied longing, of despair torturing almost to madness, of a ceaseless craving for the presence he had so continually denied. Through all those years he had thought only of the anguish of that mistaken love, for which he scorned himself, and of her scorn for him, it had seemed to him that he could not strike too hard to punish her for that. And he had struck—and she was a woman, and she had died.

Oh, he had not been right, had not been noble, other men have more pity on their wives. The poor rough workman, who comes home from his day's toil to find his earnings spent and his scanty furniture pawned, and who yet lives still in his cottage-home with the woman who ruins still more the life that must always have been hard, has

greater cause for pride. What if he is driven by her presence into more ceaseless wretchedness—he is but ruined himself, he has not killed his wife.

Oh, he had meant to do well when he had married her, he had told himself that he was keeping his promise then. He had not kept it, he had but broken it more completely by his act. And she had not deceived him, when he married her he had known her as she was; and yet—how strange it seemed—he had been so absorbed in the consciousness of his own suffering, that now, for the first time only, he was aware that she had suffered too.

With that gentler feeling now he looked down upon her face; and remembering all the bitter resentment of the past, and that time when he last had seen her, radiant in her white and crimson, in her loveliness, and in her burning scorn of him, remembering too that consciousness that was always with him of a spoilt and broken life, he asked himself if he forgave her now.

Something stirred once more within him, a strange pity into which he dared not search too much. With that feeling moving him, and

shuddering a little, he stooped and kissed her. And then he raised himself, and looked on her again.

‘If she were standing now alive before me, as she used to do, how much I should hate her!’

He checked himself, paused for a moment, looked down for the last time on the dead face, and drew the covering over it once more. Then, with his head sunk upon his breast, he turned away. The funeral chamber, the wax lights, the dead life, were left behind him—he did not look back on them again. . . . .

As he reached the door the handle turned, and Amy stood before him on the threshold, dressed in black, her face trembling, her eyes swollen with crying, and her hands filled with flowers. He looked down on her vacantly, the thought of his wife was in his mind, and it seemed strange to him that anyone should weep for her.

‘You have flowers for her,’ he said.

His voice sounded strange to himself; he went on speaking in a half-dreaming tone, as if he could not control his words.

‘She is there—I have seen her.’

Amy looked up at him, and their eyes met. A



curious quiver passed over her face, the terrible indignation of gentleness, and then she spoke.

‘ You might have come when she was dying. It is no use now.’

He looked on her with a quiet smile, as a man might look on a child, and passed her, and she went on into the room. But as he went on slowly, there was with him a strange feeling, as if a child’s hand had struck him, and struck him hard. He went downstairs to his own room, and spent the hours alone.

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The days went on, one after another ; the snow fell softly outside ; the house lay in darkness and in silence, with its blinds drawn, and only cautious footsteps moving about the passages and rooms. The preparations for the funeral had begun, but in the silent room above the wax lights were burning still. And, then, that time too was passed, and the day for the funeral came.

## CHAPTER V

FRANK and Amy stood together in the great drawing-room. A chill February wind swept over the gardens outside, and made changing lights and shadows there, whilst above were tossed clouds, blue sky, and piercing sunlight, all mingled in the variableness of spring. The snow had gone for nearly a week, and it was even true that the first flowers had come.

No look of the spring, however, was on the faces of the young companions as they stood together, reflected from the mirrors, with the fruit and

flowers of the great ceiling above their heads. Frank's face looked old and worn, and there was an expression of hard and steady resolution in his lips. He had just returned from his home, having made all arrangements for leaving England, and he had come to say a last farewell.

Certainly he appeared more altered than his companion, though in the last few weeks a greater change had come to her. Amy, in her black dress, all prettily complete, with her fair hair smooth, not crimped, had very much of her old look, though her face was paler, older, more womanly than it had been. The thought of the wealth that now belonged to her had not yet been able to affect her much; though she was glad for the sake of her father and mother, who were poor. For herself, the long strain of suffering she had endured was yet too recent for her to be easily able to rejoice; Lady Farnim was dead, she must leave Landene, and it seemed now also that she must part with Frank.

The day before she had received a letter from him in the morning, the first he had ever written to her, congratulating her with much kindness, and venturing to hope that she would be indoors on the afternoon of the next day, as he was about to leave

England for Australia, and would be glad to see her once before he left. Amy had taken the letter to her room, and read it there over and over again, sitting by her window, whilst the February sunshine shone upon the park. Something seemed to hurt her, and before she quite knew what it was, she found herself in tears. She blamed herself for this weakness, and went about her duties as usual, but the feeling of soreness remained, and would not be quite absent even from her prayers. That was on the day before, this morning an unexplained hope had made her work light, whilst it sent continually little fluttering blushes to her face. This also was not to be understood, nor did she ask herself why it was that at the first sight of his set resolute face, her heart sank suddenly into soberness again. She received him with little phrases, and a self-contained manner, received his congratulations quietly, and made a few remarks upon emigration, and travelling. Neither of them made any allusion to old conversations, or to subjects that might naturally be supposed to be in the memories of both ; but it appeared to her that this silence pleased him best. .

The mirrors reflected her as she sat there in her

black dress, with no blushes now to disturb the quietness of her face. It was not difficult to talk.

Frank, on his part, had been passing through the bitterest days that all his life had known. Ever since he had left Landene—he had been summoned home on the very morning of Lady Farnim's death—a curious secret sensation, like a concealed hope, had sustained him even through his father's increased illness and all the other troubles he had felt. The shock of that death-bed scene remained on him; the wretchedness of the story he had known so long kept still its remembrance of misery; but this one secret thought remained, notwithstanding, to preserve him from despair. And then the tidings came—and it was impossible to deny to himself the effect they must have upon his life. Oh, no doubt it was better, much better, his uncle's money was in good hands at least. Lady Farnim owed a debt of gratitude to the companion who had served her so faithfully, he could not complain of her now that the debt had been fulfilled. And she had never heard of his uncle, dear child—that was all for the best, she might else have had some hesitation in her heart. What

opportunities she would have now for all her schemes and plans ! Poor little timid, conscientious creature, how would she be able to fulfil them by herself ? He said these things and smiled over them, but low down in his heart the ceaseless whisper would be heard. 'It would have been better for me if we had both been left poor, for then it would not all have seemed so unjust to me. And for her—I was her friend, it may not be easy for her to find a friend again.'

With that pain beneath that would not leave his heart, it had not been easy for him to enter, with even outward hope, into the arrangements that were made. The relation in Australia desired to have him as an assistant on his farm as soon as possible, and he told himself that it would be best for him to go. He tried to think that he would be happier away, and that he would find new hopes and duties in the distant land. Some small amount of money had been saved out of their wrecked fortunes ; his father had been offered a home by some friends of past days, who came forward to assist them in their need ; and Frank could not feel himself any longer of necessity to him. He must go, and it was no doubt good for him that the in-

evitable parting from all for which he had cared must come so soon.

Some little correspondence had taken place between Lord Farnim and himself. The widowed lord had returned to London on the day after the funeral, his letters were grave and courteous, with no slightest token in them of the displeasure at which Mr Bortop had hinted more than once. Possibly his return to his own home, and the further information he must have received there, might have produced some change in him. But he was about to make many alterations on his estates, he did not seem to know that his young relation was in any need of assistance, and in any case Frank would not have been willing to apply to him for help.

And so the end had come, and he was alone now with Amy in the great drawing-room to say farewell. He had reached the worst at least, for the last day or two he had felt more calm, and the miserable tumult through which he had struggled had been still. And now he was nearly at the end, and he had not after all found it so difficult to speak. He was quite grave and cold,

that was how he had meant to be, but he had not thought he should find it so easy as it was.

It could only last a short while after all. He sat and talked for the half-hour he had allowed himself, he glanced at the clock with a feeling almost of relief, and then he rose. He had promised himself that he would not betray himself by any word, glance, or touch, and it seemed to him that he must have kept his word. Indeed, through all that half-hour he had scarcely seen her, he had only just been conscious of her black dress, and of the fairness of her hair above. Only a few minutes more—it would soon be over now.

‘I am afraid I must start soon,’ he said as he rose. ‘I have to catch the London train this afternoon.’

There was a short silence.

‘Will you stay long in London?’ Amy asked. She had risen too, and stood by his side, pale and quiet, with a look of womanly composure on her face. Yet there had come a little trembling in her hands. He could see her more distinctly now.

‘Some while, I think,’ he answered, cheerfully. ‘But I shall soon be starting for Australia. We shall not meet again.’



She stood there by his side in her black dress; with her hands clasped and drooping, and her dark eyes questioning, but without a word. It was necessary for him to say something more before he went.

‘You will be very happy,’ said Frank, with a wistfulness in his eyes that he could not avoid. He was thinking that in all his life to come he would keep these moments in his mind. ‘I am glad of that. I must be going now.’

‘We shall not see each other again then,’ she said. She spoke with the same quietness; there was not even a question in her tone.

‘I suppose not . . . . Perhaps it is best as it is . . . . May I say good-bye?’

He made a little movement with his hand, she did not seem as if she saw it, and turned away. A sudden shrinking had come over her, she did not feel as if she wished to touch his hand. She leant over the table near her, moving the books and papers with her fingers. And yet she could not think, only there seemed a feeling like a cry within her heart. It was hard—hard—she did not want to part with him. If she could only dare to ask him to see her again, to write to her—only she

could not, he did not want it, and it would not be right....If it was her money that was between them—she did not care for it, she did not.... And now this parting—it would be for ever, they would never be near each other again.....She kept on turning over the books and papers with her hands. The idea had come to her that she would take up something, anything, from the table and ask him to keep it as a remembrance of her. Her fingers touched an envelope that was beneath the rest, it was one that the gardener's little daughter had sent to her that morning in honour of the day. The words that she had heard from a sickbed seemed to be moving monotonously in her heart. 'Leap Year—St Valentine's.' And, then, all at once it seemed as if her heart stood still.

Oh, what was this, a sudden inspiration, a temptation, a thought that had been sent to her? She found that she had left the envelope on the table, and was standing by one of the windows at the farther end of the room, with her back to him, pushing her hair mechanically from her temples with her hands. Oh, what was it that was between them, a nothing, a conventionality—was there no escaping then from that? And, yet, if she were

wrong, if he did not wish it?—Oh, God, help her! She could not bear this—this silence . . . It was worth the risk. Very quietly she turned and came down the room once more.

Frank had scarcely observed her; he had thought only that she was occupied with some last message that she wished to give him. But the prolonging of the farewell had seemed like needless torture; he had begun to tremble very much, and let himself fall into a chair. To his own shame, he found that he could not rise even when she was standing by him; he kept still and looked up at her, it seemed as if in this manner he could preserve his calmness best. She stood in front of him, her voice was very low and soft as she spoke.

‘There is one thing I would like to ask you before you go.’

Frank looked at her, but answered neither by word or movement; he was fearing every instant that the trembling would commence again. Her dark eyes met his with a directness that was not usual with her; her hands were tightly clasped, but her words came distinctly, and she rather turned pale than blushed.

‘Frank, will you marry me?’

The words seemed to fall into the air. In an instant he started to his feet.

‘I don’t know what you mean.’

And with that one hoarse sentence flung out at her, he strode across the room, blinded, and not knowing where he went. He was stopped by the windows at the further end, the convulsive trembling commenced again, and he let himself fall into an arm-chair that happened to be there. The gardens were in front of him, with the spring sunlight upon them, but they were swimming before his eyes, and it was some instants before he could get them straight once more. It was not till then he became aware that there was an intense silence in the room.

Oh! was he alone—had she gone—how could it have been possible to him to receive in such a manner the words that she had said? He would go after her, find her, entreat her; it was only his miserable pride that was between them; it was not between them; he would bear anything rather than be obliged to think so meanly of himself. This silence now was terrible, like a punishment, a loneliness that would not end; he must find her,

kneel to her. He could not rise, but he was able now at last to turn his head. She was standing there where he had left her, and in the same attitude, a slight black figure, with her hands clasped and drooping, and her eyes fixed on him. Even then he could not rise or speak, but with a little miserable movement he held out his arms to her. He had not thought she would pay any attention, but she did. She moved quietly, and came slowly down the room to him.

She stood by his side; their eyes met. Frank could not speak or move, he could only look with a longing entreating glance at her. There was a moment's silence, and they looked at each other; and then all at once the quietness of her face broke up into such blushes, smiles, dimples, as must have surprised herself, and with a motion soft and mischievous like that of a kitten she laid her clasped hands on his shoulder.

‘Frank—won’t you marry me?’

She could say no more, for before she could have got further he had seized her in his arms, clasping her with all his strength, kissing her over and over again, crushing her face between his hands, as a man might crumple a rosebud in his fingers. Then

he let her go, and they started from each other, breathing hard, excited, unable yet to look each other in the face.

‘I must do what you asked me, I can’t help it; I must do it now that I have kissed you,’ said Frank, in too much excitement to be able to understand a word he said. ‘But I didn’t mean to do it, and I had resolved not to do it, and I wouldn’t have done it if you had not forced me to it. There!’

## CONCLUSION

THERE remain now only a few words, but it is perhaps as well that these also should be said.

The great house at Landene stands gray and deserted in the midst of its park and gardens now, the shutters are drawn, there is little smoke from the chimneys, and there is a lonely and lifeless look about the place. The mists crawl round it in the evenings, and give a white and ghost-like appearance to the trees in the park ; in the winter there are no gleams of firelight from the barred windows ; and in the summer there are no hands to pick the great

red roses, amongst which its beautiful captive mistress wandered once. To those who know there is a haunting sense of her about the place, and about the rooms in which few footfalls can be heard, though her name is not inscribed on the family monument, and though her loveliness finds no place amongst the portraits on the walls. Deserted, disowned, there is yet no one who comes to take her place, and the home in which she was so hardly permitted to spend her lonely years is left deserted—to lie in deeper silence now. For Lord Farnim has not returned to it again.

He lives a great deal abroad—a great deal in London; he superintends the building of that larger house on the larger estate which yet was not the home of his childhood, and it is supposed that there he will eventually reside. He remains much alone; he has many political acquaintances with whom he corresponds; he is very generous at times, but he has few friends, and is considered eccentric and perverse. It is not yet known who his heir or heirs will be, for he has no near relations of his own. A few words in a letter to one of those with whom he is most intimate may perhaps explain the rest.



'You blame me very hardly,' he says, 'and I cannot help thinking, without cause. I am not like other men, I cannot marry, or settle, or make to myself a contented happiness in life. And yet perhaps the two last privileges may yet be mine, though I feel myself excluded from the first. You will never understand my sensations on this subject, so I will not attempt to speak of them. Only believe that when I say I should be afraid to ask any woman to share my life, I mean that it is for her sake I should fear, and not for mine. I know, I feel that such union would not be attended with a blessing, and I have no right therefore to attempt it. The remembrance of the past is too strong on me for that. If I was too hard once, it is in this manner that God punishes me now.'

So he goes on his lonely way, and enters upon the deeper shadows of middle life alone. It is in such manner that we find ourselves condemned with our own condemnation, and learn to judge ourselves at last as we have judged.

Dr Merse has a flourishing London practice, his girls have a governess, and Tommie is receiving a good school education now. His prospects are cheerful, and he has a comfortable home. But

he preserves his quick keenness of good-nature still, and sometimes is rather inclined to find fault with the little wife for her overweening delight in the fairy eldest daughter from whom good things have come. No doubt darling Amy has done very well both for herself and them, but the other dear girls have surely virtues too.

There was one to whom the thought of that marriage, of which we know, was at first a source of anything rather than of pride. The friends of Mr Mannian, finding themselves relieved from a burden, and prompted, too, by that secret feeling which induces most of us to admire one who has contrived for himself a favourable match, were very much disposed to express delight in Frank. It was strange that the father did not seem to share their sensations, though he was careful not to say a single word against his son. The delicate, gray-haired clergyman, so happily relieved when least relief was hoped, went about in those days amongst his friends like a man who is borne down with some secret feeling of vexation or of shame. So apparent was this, indeed, that there were some who whispered that this must be only another instance of the absurdity of a father's pride, and that he

had hoped for his handsome son some match with better 'connections' after all. They whispered and talked, but Mr Mannian paid no smallest heed to them. Only when he found himself alone with his pretty daughter-in-law of the future in her London home did he venture to say a word or two at last.

'I am afraid you will think me an old croaker, my dear,' he said, 'and possibly you may consider me something like an old fool as well. But, indeed, I am not altogether so pleased about this wedding of yours as I could wish. The fact is that it all turns out rather too favourably for us. You are young, rich, and very pretty—I should have been better pleased if Frank had not been so ready to offer his poverty to you.'

There was a little pause, whilst the lights burned dimly, for there was a fog without, and the noise of the carriages could be plainly heard as they rolled away to evening parties down the streets.

'He never did offer his poverty to me,' said Amy, whilst deep blushes began to burn in the rosebud fairness of her face. 'He would not ask me, not even by a word or look, I think he had too much of his father's pride for that.'

Mr Mannian smiled, but the smile had his old

sarcastic expression as it came. 'I will not ask,' he said, 'in what manner he intimated his desire.' He stopped here, for with a reproving distressed expression the dark childish eyes, wide-opened with a sudden effort, were turned on him.

'Oh, I don't like to speak of it, but I can't help it now. I—I—asked *him*,' said Amy, and she hid her face with a sudden movement in her hands. Her second father rose from his seat, and spared her further confusion by taking her at once into his arms.

Indeed, after receiving this information Mr Mannian was more able to find himself at last content. His old fashioned chivalry assisted him—when a lady had done to Frank so great an honour it was not, of course, permitted to him to refuse it. And, of course, after such obvious reasoning, it became more easy also to accept the good things that resulted for himself. He has a pleasant little home in the country now, his books are round him, and he is able to take a 'duty' now and then. His face is very thin and delicate, but it is by some degrees less haggard than of old.

Mr Bortop has been superseded, but he continues notwithstanding to live on an ample pension in the

corner of the park, and to relate many stories of the splendours of the family that will soon be only a remembrance of the past. In one of the German towns, there is a broken-down old man, who plays cards for pence with his attendants, and prates in his dotage of his dead daughter, and of the greatness of the son-in-law who provides for him. There is a little pleasant estate, once belonging to Lord Farnim, that has been sold to provide as a home for two others whom we know. The old clergyman who helped to pay for the painted window once is still living, and married the young couple when the day for the ceremony came.

‘We will have such a good time together, and will get through such lots of errors,’ Frank had said. ‘We will aim at a general reform of the world, we will have a great deal to do with schools and missionaries, we will consider all existing charities, and we shall have made ever so many blunders before many years are out.’

No doubt they have kept their word—particularly with regard to the blunders—but there is besides a certain charm in that young household that all who visit it have owned. Its home is in a lovely wooded country, but it has other beauty too

—it is not given to all to be able to impress on those who come near them the remembrance that there can after all be both sweetness and freshness in the world.

Indeed we need all of us to make up our minds that amongst our English meadows there are such existences and homes, such young upright consciences, such pure unstained souls that heavenly fire has touched. For in the mud of our lanes and the smoke of our cities there are such wretched lives, such hard poverty, such polluted ambition, and such worldly cares, that the moments come to us when the tread of lost feet makes a bewildered sound within our ears, and we seem to ourselves to be living in the midst of a grovelling and God-forsaken world. The song of the lark becomes no longer sweet when we remember the hearts on which it falls, the glory of the sunset on the grass seems a strange setting to the meanness of the souls in which a more glorious splendour should be found—there is danger lest we should be drawn by these things towards a hopelessness in which we shall find ourselves also chain-bound, and forsaken with the rest. Only we will not be deceived, the faith that was signed upon our childish foreheads

keeps still its strength ; though lives are broken,  
and homes are miserable, we will not look upon  
darkness until it has blinded us to light :—

Until it seems that, lost in mists and tears,  
The fairy light can touch the world no more,  
And that the tales that charmed our childhood's ears  
Were wavering fancies, scarce believed of yore.  
No knight goes out in strength and honour now ;  
No dragon owns the might his arm shall bring ;  
No maidens crown with flowers the conqueror's brow ;  
No gathering fairies pause their spells to sing ;  
No prince hears voices through the failing light  
Call from the whispering woods or moonlit lake,  
Or, struggling through the enchanted forest's night,  
Finds the sweet princess whom his kiss shall wake ;  
But childhood's feet are trained in paths of ill,  
And sordid cares oppress our manhood's prime,  
And money's chink and passionate voices still  
Drown the last echoes of that earlier time.  
So seems it—but beneath the fancied dearth  
The higher laws still guide our lot with ruth,  
And Hands divine keep pure through all the earth  
The golden threads of beauty and of truth.  
For still in quiet nooks or loneliest ways,  
Or where the city's din doth most abound,  
Their secret light gives brightness to our days ;  
And where one thought of faith or trust is found,  
Where love can make the sweetest cure for pain,  
Where soul is joined to soul, and heart to will,  
The old enchantments find the world again,  
The fairy legends their fulfilment still.

THE END





